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# BOOK SELECTION

## Its Principles and Practice







## FOREWORD

SINCE 1925, reading as a subject for scientific study and investigation has assumed unusual importance in the United States. More than 1,000 studies have been published on the subject within the decade. As a result, reading has assumed greater significance in both child and adult life, for it is certain that reading in the future will be more extensively utilized in developing good habits of thinking, stimulating broad interests, and sharpening the faculty of critical evaluation.

While most of the studies have dealt with the educational aspects of reading, other studies have investigated phases of the subject related to their respective fields. Moreover, due to the increased interest in adult education and the emphasis now placed upon the scientific aspects of librarianship, librarians and students of library science have contributed their share to these studies. They have been especially concerned with problems of reading interests, habits, difficulties, and the like.

The collaboration of librarians, readers' advisers, psychologists, educators, sociologists, and, more recently, publishers, has yielded extensive data in a field which is receiving increasing attention not only from librarians in their task of organizing and administering libraries, but also from workers in other fields in their attempt to interpret social behaviour or

## FOREWORD

to adjust reading materials to the abilities of various groups.

The present volume, *Book Selection : its Principles and Practice*, by Mr. Wellard, has grown out of these investigations. Beginning with the origins of the public library in the United States and Great Britain, Mr. Wellard has undertaken to determine the principles of book selection according to the objectives for which the public library exists; and to outline a practice which profits from methods borrowed from the social sciences.

The present study, divided into three parts, deals successively with: (1) the history of the public library movements in the United States and Great Britain; (2) the development of a theory of book selection in terms of principles drawn from the contingent fields of literature, political philosophy, sociology, and psychology; and (3) illustrations of practical methods whereby librarians can work out a system of book selection which will meet the requirements of scientific procedure.

To his work the author brings his training as a student of reading, his experience as a librarian, and a distinctive ability for clear analytical statement.

The study breaks new ground in showing how fields of knowledge heretofore largely neglected by librarians may contribute to the development of a sound theory of book selection. To the extent that it does this, the author has demonstrated the possibility of a library "science" in the sense that sociology and education are nowadays recognized as sciences.

LOUIS R. WILSON.

University of Chicago.

July 1st, 1936.

## PREFACE

A SIGNIFICANT feature of recent years has been the tendency to re-examine first principles with the object of formulating an adequate theory of librarianship. Many circumstances, internal and external, have contributed to this. The development of the library service to a stage when equipment, technical processes, and routine have attained reasonable adequacy and efficiency, naturally tends towards a concentration of attention on wider questions of policy and administration. No doubt this is a clear case of putting the cart before the horse, but it has been inevitable in a service that has evolved from the experiments and enthusiasms of unco-ordinated individual units. Now, however, we have standards of practice that will function reasonably well in most circumstances, and can devote our attention to librarianship proper. Dr. Pierce Butler's criticism in 1933 that a rationalization of each immediate technical process by itself seems to satisfy the librarian to the exclusion of the theoretical aspects of his profession, has already—thanks largely to Dr. Butler himself—lost a good deal of its force.

The external pressure of the economic circumstances of the past few years, and the resulting closer scrutiny of the expenditure of public money, has also compelled the librarian to re-examine the basic principles and value of the many sides of his work. The money available for the purchase of books, being the most



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elastic portion of any library's budget, is the first to suffer; and it is only natural that a great deal of attention has been devoted to examining the questions relating to the selection and purchase of books, the nature of the public demand, and the problems of bringing the right books and readers together.

Mr. Wellard's consideration of the theory of book selection is therefore opportune. Taking the history of public libraries from the early days when they were regarded by some as alternatives to the drinking-den, to the most recent systematic surveys of the reading habits of population-groups, he has endeavoured to define their true functions and potentialities. On this wide basis he has constructed a theory of book selection that deserves the closest attention. It may be argued, with some justification, that book selection is an art rather than a science, and cannot be subjected to scientific discipline; but any librarian will profit by a careful study of this statement of the principles and functions of book-supply. Mr. Wellard's interesting and valuable book should do much to remedy the haphazard performance of the most important part of the librarian's task.

JAMES D. STEWART.

Bermondsey Public Library,  
London.

*August 1st, 1936.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE writer wishes to record his thanks to Professor Douglas Waples under whose direction this study was conceived and written; to the Dean and Faculty of the Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago for their criticisms and suggestions; to the Rockefeller Foundation for the Fellowship which made the study possible; and to Mr. James D. Stewart of the Bermondsey Public Library, London, for his interest in this work.

Thanks are also due to *The Library Association Record*, *The Library Journal*, and *The Library Quarterly* for permission to reproduce in the same or adapted form, articles first presented in those journals.

Special reference should be made to the map used in Figure IV, a map taken from a library study entitled "Woodside Does Read!" and generously supplied to the writer by Dr. Grace O. Kelley, Director of the Woodside (New York) library survey.

JAMES HOWARD WELLARD.

Chicago, U.S.A., 1936.



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## INTRODUCTION

### I. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

THE purpose of this study is threefold: first to trace the origin and development of the public library in America and Great Britain with a view to discovering the social objectives of the institution at various periods of its history and the effect of those objectives on public library book selection; second, to outline a *theory* resting upon more specific bases than practical book selection rests upon to-day; and third, to suggest methods and techniques for translating that theory into practice.

Each of these aspects of the study comprises in itself a very wide territory, and each of them has been severely limited in its present treatment.

It is apparent that the history of the public library includes both the history of a general social *movement* and an account of particular *institutions*. The present study is concerned only with the former. Again, this general social movement is made up of many local factors and developments, which a complete and exacting history would have to take into consideration. This dissertation does not consider such factors and developments independently, but attempts instead the somewhat hazardous task of a wide and generalized overview. This kind of generalization is dependent upon the assumption that there are, underlying the

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specific and local variations, broad and inclusive trends representative of what is commonly meant by the public library. Our study investigates those trends or social objectives (the two terms are interchangeable in the social philosophy advanced in this study) which relate to the public library's primary function, namely, the distribution of literature to the people.

In attempting to designate those social objectives at all clearly, the writer is constantly hampered by the seeming absence of specific social aims and forces which have positively determined public library policy ; and also by the incompleteness of professional literature as source material. In the first case, this means that the writer must often fall back upon his personal interpretation of public library trends and social implications, with the constant risk of both misunderstanding and misrepresenting them, and this pitfall is now offered as a part-excuse for most of the findings and opinions expressed in this study. In the second case, as far as the deficiencies of the sources are concerned, references have been made not because they have any claim to authoritativeness, but because they seemed to illustrate trends or opinions once evidently current in the library world. In this respect, the reader may well object that the citations are prejudiced, unrepresentative, or even trivial. To this the only answer is that the professional literature of librarianship, in common with the literature of other learned bodies, consists of a mass of diversified and uneven writing, all of which, however, seems to be indicative of some aspect of current opinion.

The present writer has attempted to make his documentation as representative and inclusive as possible. No major source, whether governmental or

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

official or private, has been overlooked, and, indeed, most opinions and interpretations advanced have been based on the evidence of the major sources of library history.

On the other hand, there have been certain definite trends which one feels bound to note in spite of their unfavourable aspects, and which seemed best illustrated by references to less convincing authorities. The trend towards Americanization during the first two decades of the twentieth century is such a one, and the librarian may well object that he neither subscribes to such a social objective nor recognizes the validity of the citations. We can admit at once the justice of his opinion but must, if we are to retain our intellectual honesty, also admit the existence of such a trend and its support by a certain school of professional thought. In brief, the historian can afford to ignore no trends or primary sources, even though he finds them unsympathetic and trivial.

We hasten to admit that misrepresentation can work both ways, through over-emphasis as through omission, and some writers are temperamentally given to the former and some to the latter. We have attempted in this study to avoid both defects, but since some interpretations and some opinions have been advanced here possibly for the first time, they may appear somewhat irreconcilable with currently accepted theories as to the origin and development of the public library. But this is an issue which can be clarified only by more intensive investigations; and, in any case, the present study does not set itself up as an incontrovertible document on any aspect of either public library history or administration. To the contrary, it is an attempt simply to analyse from a new angle such primary



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sources as we have, and to follow them through to what has seemed their logical conclusions.

The second aspect we shall take up—the effect of general trends and policies on book selection—appears to be incidental to the first, and inseparable from it. Whatever the immediate aims of the book selector, his choice is ultimately determined by some social philosophy in respect to the library. This second division, then, will fall within the limits of the first, that is, it, too, will be a generalized overview rather than a specific study of the policies of particular libraries and their individual theories of book selection. Indeed, we have intimated in our discussion of the administrative bases of book selection that the chief deficiency in this branch of library science is the absence of a general body of data unrestricted by local circumstances or personal points of view. This absence of general data and a comparative theory, like the absence of comprehensive records kept over a long period of time and including matter other than gross circulation statistics, will be regretted by all librarians, whether practitioners or students. But these are administrative or practical considerations and must be referred to that section of the study which takes them up in more detail.<sup>1</sup> At present we are generally concerned with the interaction of social objectives on book selection policy, a relationship which, it is hoped, will be implicit in our findings concerning those objectives.

When we come to discuss the second part of this study—the bases for a theory of book selection—it is necessary to make several explanations and stipulations. Among the former will be a transitional statement indicating the importance of an historical

<sup>1</sup> Part II, Chapter IX.

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

approach to an understanding of book selection, at first glance two apparently unrelated aspects of librarianship. They will not seem disconnected, however, if it is agreed that a theory of book selection cannot exist in a vacuum, any more than the practice can; nor can it be isolated from the historical and social factors which have brought the public library into being, and which are vital to its continual metamorphosis. For, in one sense, the library is its book selection, so that the causes and effects common to one will react upon the other. Therefore, it was considered essential to visualize a theory of book selection in the public library against the background of its social philosophy, all the more so as the acceptance of some social purpose is, and always has been, indispensable to the organized selection and distribution of books.

### 2. SCOPE OF THE STUDY—PART I

A word of explanation is needed with reference to the historical introduction in justification of the year 1850 or thereabouts as the period of origin for the public library. The choice of a particular date with which to commence the history of an institution like the public library is no doubt a very arbitrary procedure, for it is quite apparent, as one writer has expressed it, that the public library "did not, Minerva-like, spring full armoured from the brow of Jove";<sup>1</sup> to the contrary, it is certain that the social consciousness necessary for the formulation and development of such an institution was the result of centuries, and may be traced back, together with the growth of other

<sup>1</sup> J. H. SHERA, "Recent Social Trends and Future Library Policy," *Library Quarterly*, October 1933, p. 340.

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

popular movements, to the rise of the middle class in the eighteenth century and the gradual emancipation of the working class in the nineteenth. As far as libraries were concerned, certain provisions had been made for the new types of reader before the establishment of the public library in its modern form. The circulating libraries of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries catered to the well-to-do middle class, and the mechanics institutes to the artisans. Besides these agencies, there were libraries with still more specialized functions, such as the parochial, catechetical, Sunday school, mercantile, factory, municipal, and school district libraries. Such book collections were nominally available to all classes in the community, but were of necessity limited in their appeal and usefulness to those groups whom they designed to serve. It will be admitted that this statement introduces a functional concept which precludes to a great extent the theory that the public library was the direct offspring of any one of them. In this study any generic relationship has been rejected on the grounds that there is really no homologous resemblance, except in the common function of distributing books from a central source. But when we come to consider the kind of literature distributed, the social objectives and implications of the public library in comparison with these other book agencies, we find sufficiently wide divergences to justify the opinion that the public library was differently conceived and differently dedicated from them<sup>all</sup>.

It has not been possible in the generalized overview, which is all the present historical analysis can claim to be, to trace the part played by the different species of library in the development of the public library itself.

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

It is probable, however, that this latter system took over the functions of many of the others (whether rightly or wrongly is another problem for the historian) and gradually superseded them. This fact likewise contributes to the belief that the public library developed by a process of evolution from an existing form under the powerful stimulus of popular demand. Much of the evidence adduced in the following analysis militates against such a conclusion. Without anticipating the arguments and theories therein advanced, it may be intimated that the social causes responsible for the public library were not so much the demands of particular groups with clearly defined reading needs, but were to a large extent the result of the reformative, philanthropic, educational, and sometimes even paternalistic intentions of certain superior minorities. This theory is not, however, advanced in order to discredit the public library, but as a theory which best explains the evidence. And since that evidence begins at about 1850, in both America and England, that year is taken as a purely arbitrary stepping-stone from which to proceed to the subsequent developments. Before tracing that evidence, we have turned our glance backward for a moment to the state of popular reading in the two countries prior to the establishment of the first tax-supported public libraries. All that lies beyond is perforce omitted but not forgotten.

### 3. PLAN OF THE STUDY—PART II

Our study of the actual theory of book selection will differ from other manuals and primers of book selection mainly in its approach to the subject. The conventional approach both in the practice and the

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

literature of book selection has been the bibliographical one, in which the primary emphasis is laid on the book rather than on the relation of the book to the reader and the relation of the library to society in general. Because the latter considerations have not been systematically investigated, librarians have concerned themselves principally with the nature of good literature, which sometimes involved general reference to assumed principles of literary criticism, various attempts to infer a social philosophy of the public library, and the application of a rough-and-ready law of supply and demand in the actual practice of book selection. It seems, indeed, as though the problem of book selection has almost been limited in scope to the four walls of the individual library, without sufficient consideration for the wider implications, which must eventually lead into investigations other than the purely bibliographical. Yet there are many fields of research which bear closely on the problem of book selection, notably literature, sociology, and psychology, the first of which, together with its related studies, deals with the nature of the book ; the second with the place and function of the library in society ; and the third with the nature and conditions of reading.

The present study is an attempt to indicate the bases of book selection in these and other fields ; to outline the contribution of each to the theory and practice of book selection ; and to suggest techniques for dealing with problems hitherto ignored by librarians.

While each of three aspects—the literary, the psychological, and the sociological—are all integral parts of any adequate theory of book selection, the approach to the problem may be through any one, according to the type of library and its recognized function. If, for

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

instance, that function is the preservation of written records, the emphasis will be on the bibliographical principles of curatorship; if that function is the supply of learned books, the emphasis will be on scholarship; and, again, if it is considered the distribution of the best books to those who feel inclined to read them, the approach will be mainly literary. In none of these cases is the librarian much concerned with the psychological and sociological problems involved in his book selection, since the objectives of his library and the types of reader, having already been defined, may be regarded as constant factors in his calculations. In the public library, however, neither the books to be supplied nor the reading clientele, nor the social objectives to be striven for, are anything near so definite.

The second part attempts not so much to specify what those books may be, who are the readers, and what are the social objectives, as to indicate the bases for a theory of book selection comprehensive enough to take all of these factors into account.

### 4. APPLICATION OF THE STUDY—PART III

Book selection, after all, has no meaning apart from certain processes necessarily performed from time to time in libraries of one kind or another. A theory of book selection, therefore, is in a sense purposeless unless it is translated into terms of everyday needs and practices. Librarians might with good cause be indifferent to a theoretical study, however well conceived and elaborated, if the study had no application to what they were concerned with. For even if there is a science of librarianship, it can be no more than an applied science.

The third part of this book is an attempt to bring

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

an otherwise generalized discussion into the sphere of the particular library and into the scope of the individual librarian's tangible problems. It is, in brief, an analysis of the methods and techniques used in comparable studies whose primary function, like that of book selection, is to discover and satisfy the requirements of the general population.

In propounding these methods, the writer has sought to steer a middle course between the extremes of advanced statistics and of sheer guess-work. He feels that he is equipped for this task insofar as he realizes the value of statistical aids to community analysis, even while retaining certain practical objections to an uncompromisingly mathematical treatment of an obviously human problem. In other words, the more precise procedure of book selection which is envisaged in this study, is impossible without more precise methods of defining and stating it : hence the need of a quasi-statistical approach ; on the other hand, the problems involved cannot be explained entirely in terms of complicated formulæ, multiple correlations, graphs, charts, and the other equipment of the statistician. Therefore the writer has attacked the third part of this study from the viewpoint of the practical librarian, as he attacked the second part from the viewpoint of the student. It will be permissible to point out here that he has been both—both a working librarian and a student of reading. In the former capacity, he learned to recognize the problems, difficulties, and limitations of the practitioner ; and in the latter, he became familiar with new and more precise methods of coping with those problems. In this third part, in this attempted translation of principles into practice, he has aimed at a synthesis of his observations from

## INTRODUCTION. PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PLAN

both points of view. According to the degree of success, depends the plausibility of this whole work.

The librarian is accustomed by now to the varied approaches of theorists to the subject of book selection; but he no doubt expects a fair degree of conformity in the practical treatment. The treatment in this case is not, we believe, the customary or the expected one. Very little mention has been made, for instance, of the necessary bibliographical tools for book selection or of routine processes such as book ordering and the like. It has frankly been considered that discussion of these aspects of the book selector's craft is superfluous. The use, and even the number and nature of bibliographies, book lists, catalogues, and so forth, are best discovered from experience. The compilation of a bibliography is an invaluable contribution to library knowledge and equipment; a description of it in a textbook appears to the present writer valueless.

The reader is asked, then, to give the possibly unusual approach to practical book selection adopted in the third part of this study the benefit of his deferred judgment. The terminology, methods, and recommendations may at first strike him as somewhat pretentious. The introduction of certain statistical techniques, however elementary, may be rejected by some as bothersome. The scope and implications of the proposed investigations may alarm others as impractical. Yet the writer is still convinced that a theory of book selection will be sound to the degree that it depends upon allied fields of knowledge for its content; that a practice will be most effective when implemented with the methods of modern social science; and that a sound theory and an efficient practice are attainable through the collective and individual response of librarians to these principles.





## PART I

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## THE SOCIAL PURPOSE OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

“Librarianship, as we know it, can be fully apprehended only through an understanding of its historic origins.”—PIERCE BUTLER, *Introduction to Library Science*, p. 81.



## CHAPTER I

POPULAR READING AND LIBRARY FACILITIES IN  
ENGLAND DURING THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

## I. LIBRARIES AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL REFORM

ON March 15th, 1849, the following order is recorded in the Minutes of the House of Commons:

*Ordered*, That a Select Committee be appointed on the best Means of extending the Establishment of Libraries freely open to the Public, especially in Large Towns, in *Great Britain and Ireland*.

By March 23rd, a committee of fifteen members of Parliament had been appointed, and on July 23rd was published: *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries: together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix*.<sup>1</sup> These minutes, usually referred to as the "1849 Report," consist of 317 quarto pages of evidence; twenty pages of introductory matter; eleven plans of the principal cities of Europe, with the disposition of their libraries; a map "exhibiting the relative provision of books, in Libraries publicly accessible, in the Principal States of Europe, as compared with their respective populations"; and an Appendix as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Ordered, by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 23 July, 1849.

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### APPENDIX, No. 1

- i. Approximate statistical view of the principal public libraries of Europe and of the United States of America.
- ii. An account of the sums granted by Parliament for the support of public libraries and museums, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, from the year 1823 to the year 1848, both inclusive.
- iii. An account of the sums spent on the library of the British Museum, from its foundation, in the year 1753 to the year 1848, both inclusive.
- iv. An account of the sums granted by the French Chambers for the support of public libraries and museums in France, from the year 1823 to the year 1848, both inclusive.
- v. A list of some provincial libraries in Scotland, chiefly supported by voluntary contributions.

### APPENDIX, No. 2

Tabular view of the Institutes comprised in what is called the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes; Number of members and subscribers; Lecturers; Classes, Reading Rooms; Annual income; etc.

### APPENDIX, No. 3

Table of the Mechanics' Institutions of England and Wales, their libraries and yearly issues of their books.

This represents an attempt to get as complete a picture as possible of the state of reading and libraries in Europe and America. For this purpose thirty witnesses were called—American, French, German, Italian, and Belgian among them—and tables of statistics drawn up. Fortunately, however, the evidence given in the case of England was not confined to the statement of bare facts and figures, such as the numbers and holdings of libraries, but many significant glimpses were given of the social conditions under which the reformers who constituted the committee wished to establish the public

library system; of the desire of people for reading ; of their efforts to satisfy this desire and establish libraries of their own; of existing working-class book centres; of the supply of reading material and the literature popular with artisans; and lastly, of the social significance and effect of reading. Some of this evidence is direct, some indirect, and most of it requires interpretation; but of its value there can be no question, for here we have a situation unique in the history of reading and libraries in England, namely, the comparative absence of extraneous influences on the working classes. The only serious rival to reading seems to have been the public-house. Otherwise, there were no standardized amusements, no adult education movement, and none of the modern facilities for recreation and the interchange of ideas. It would have been possible in the England of 1849 to have found many groups socially and culturally isolated and to have studied the influence of reading on their mental development, almost as under laboratory conditions. Some superficial observations were given by several of the social workers among the witnesses, but it is evident that they only saw broad trends—generally what they wanted to see—which was the moral improvement of the working classes. The evidence on this point is the least satisfactory of all, characterized, as it is, by a too-zealous humanitarian point of view and considerable vagueness in the actual statement of the facts. For instance, to the question:

1821.—What effect do you consider was produced by this system on the general character of the population ?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This and the subsequent quotations are either the questions of the Committee or the answers of the witnesses. In the *Report* the questions and their answers are numbered consecutively throughout, hence page references are not necessary.

## BOOK SELECTION

the Rev. J. C. Brown replied:

The general effect was good; I am not able to bring forward cases of decided conversion or moral reformation; but everywhere people spoke favourably of the effect of stationing a library in a village.

The committee pressed all the witnesses on this point, however, and there was general agreement as to the beneficial influence of good books on the working classes. One witness, G. Dawson, Esq., M.A., who was examined in his capacity of itinerant lecturer, and hence acquainted with the "wants and feelings of the working classes," is somewhat more specific, judging from the following questions and his replies.

1273.—Would you say that the habits of the people had improved in the last ten or twenty years, particularly with respect to temperance?—Yes.

1274.—Does that naturally lead to more refined pursuits?—Yes.

1275.—And more extensive habits of reading than formerly?—Yes, and the character of the amusements is changed. Bull-baiting and dog-fighting in Birmingham were the public favourite sports; now the bull-baiting has gone altogether, and although the dog-fighting does exist, it is only amongst the most ignorant of the people.

Now when we find the committee continually emphasizing these social considerations and deliberately framing their questions in order to elicit a favourable reply, the reform motive in the establishment of public libraries becomes apparent—a conclusion substantiated by the known humanitarian zeal and activities of the members of the committee. Much of the enthusiasm for public libraries was a reaction against

the evils of the public-house, and the committee are never more gratified than when a witness testifies to the superior attraction of reading to drinking. Samuel Smiles attested:

2001.—Give a man an interesting book to take home with him to his family, and it is probable that the man will stay at home and read his book in preference to going out and spending his time in dissipation or in idleness; and, therefore, the formation of those libraries would be favourable to the improvement of the moral and intellectual condition of the working population.

and again, according to the Rev. H. Mackenzie:

2083.—Do you think that the establishment of local reading-rooms would take them away from the public-houses, by affording them a comfortable shelter for the evening?—Decidedly . . . I think the result would be in every way beneficial, both in elevating the character of the working classes and improving their conduct, and ultimately very much lowering the rates, of which many parishioners complain.

while Mr. William Jones of the Religious Tract Society concluded:

2668.—. . . that persons have been led by those libraries, in many cases, to seek their recreation in literature rather than public-houses.

The one dissenting voice was that of the Rev. H. Mackenzie, who deplored the fact that he found:

2075.—. . . the younger subscribers to the library difficult to get to church on Sunday, because they were reading Walter Scott's novels.

Comparable with the moral improvement ascribed to reading is the educational influence claimed for it—likewise a strong argument in favour of legislation by



## BOOK SELECTION

Parliament. Edward Edwards, in reply to a question, answered pertinently:

292.—I think access to good libraries would be one great mean of advancing the educational condition of the country.

The lecturer Dawson and the biographer Smiles were of a similar opinion. It is instructive to compare the opinion of the distinguished foreign witnesses on the educational implications. For instance, His Excellency, M. Van de Meyer, Belgian ambassador, did not think that a library:

686.—. . . ought to be a sort of saloon, where people come and spend five or six hours at leisure with the first book they call for, a novel, and so on. I do not think that that is the object for which public libraries ought to open.

So, too, M. W. Libri, the Italian witness, pointed out that, whereas in Italy every municipality aided by the government supported a public library, its purpose was scholarly and not recreational. He writes in his explanatory letter:

What my experience has taught me is, that it ought never to be attempted to use, as a popular library, the large libraries intended in the first instance for a superior class of readers.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, he could see no reason for popular libraries for the working classes (whom he quaintly terms "this very numerous and interesting portion of the population"), since none existed in Italy.

A third implication relevant to the reform aspect was the supposed influence of reading on political issues, the committee hoping to prove the stabilizing

<sup>1</sup> *Report, op. cit.*, p. 121\*.

effect of literature. In this they were anticipating the objections of the reactionaries in Parliament, nor were they underestimating the opposition, judging from the stormy passage of the 1850 Public Library Act through the Lower House.<sup>1</sup> Hence the significant question:

1357.—I gather from you that your opinion is, that the diffusion of knowledge and the establishment of libraries for the benefit of the working classes would have the effect of rendering the people less liable to be led aside and made tools of by political agitators.

In contrast to the pacifying effect of discreetly managed libraries, is the supposedly inflammatory or subversive nature of much of popular literature, referred to in these questions:

2696.—May not those books be held to contain some doctrines of a doubtful social character, as well as other objectionable features?

3104.—I think the feeling has been that they were raising the lower classes too high by giving them information, and that it is better to keep them without it.

It was felt that these tendencies could be controlled through censorship, best enacted through the medium of the public library.

Before proceeding to examine the actual state of reading at this date, the means of meeting the demand for books, and the demands of the people themselves for public libraries, we may sum up the first section of this survey by concluding that the motives of the social reformers in the establishment of libraries were three: the moral improvement, the education, and the appeasement of the masses.

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* (London: Cornelius Buck, 1850), CXI, 1174-79.

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### 2. POPULAR READING AND WORKING-CLASS LIBRARIES

The evidence in the report of the people's desire for libraries is of two kinds—direct and indirect. Under direct evidence is included: (1) the voiced demand of the populace for libraries by means of petition; and (2) the statements of witnesses as to the people's desire for a book service. In the whole report there are only two references to direct petitions, one by Edward Edwards, who intimated that there had been several instances of petitions in large towns for the erection of public libraries. Unfortunately, however, the towns are not specified. Moreover, the petition may have been made by a minority group, in which case it could not be taken as expressive of the wishes of the electorate at large. The other reference to direct petitioning specifies the town of Aberdeen:

737.—. . . the town council, and in general the middle and professional classes of Aberdeen, would be extremely willing to do something in aid of such a purpose.

Inasmuch as this willingness seemed restricted to the "middle and professional classes" and the committee were concerned with the working classes, the question was immediately put:

738.—Do you think that such an institution is much wanted in Aberdeen, and that it would do great good to the working classes?—I am perfectly satisfied . . . it would do great good.

Statements by the witnesses as to the desire of the people for books, and of their efforts to get them, are unsatisfactory. They are either vague generalizations, to the effect that the ratepayers of Warrington offered no objection to a rate for the establishment of a public

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library in their town, or references to exceptionally  
studious artisans. The lecturer Dawson records that:

1253.—I have known men rise at five and work till eight for  
book-money, and then go to their day's work.

and again:

1267.—I could produce five or six working men whom I  
should be happy to have examined against almost any  
of the middle classes of the place. They are the men  
who have wrestled it out.

Another inference of popular sympathy with the  
library movement may be made from the evidence of  
the town clerk of Warrington, who replied in answer  
to a question whether there was any opposition to the  
public library established in his town and supported  
by a  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. rate:

1698.—None in the council, and not from half a dozen  
individuals, so far as I am aware, in the borough.

The evidence is still uncertain, as the matter was not  
decided by vote of the people, and, in any case, lack

TABLE I

STATISTICS FOR THE WARRINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
OVER A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS<sup>1</sup>

Population	Borrowers			Percentage of Popula- tion	Volumes (Donated)	Average Daily Issue		
	A	B	Total			A	B	Total
21,116 ...	345	369	714	3.4	1,100-1,200	2	2	4

<sup>1</sup> A = Number of books borrowed from the library. B = Number of  
books read in the library.

The data are collected from the town clerk's evidence given before the  
committee and contained in the 1849 *Report*, pp. 107-11.

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of opposition does not imply agreement. The clerk assured the committee, however, that the library was "viewed by the population with a favourable eye," and that he had not heard any complaint from the rate-payers.

When we come to examine the actual figures quoted by Marsh and set out in Table I, we are bound to conclude that, however unopposed the citizens were to the establishment and support of a library, they certainly did not make much use of it. Moreover, the evidence of the figures rather discounts the clerk's conviction that "the persons who frequent the library seem to be of the working classes."

Further indefinite evidence is furnished by William Lovett, when speaking of the possible appreciation of public libraries by the people:

2796.—I judge from the efforts which have been made by the working classes to establish libraries for themselves. The better-paid mechanics or artisans exert themselves to have little libraries of their own. I know a great number who have very respectable libraries.

We shall follow up the reference to the efforts of the workers to form libraries of their own. Such evidence is invaluable as showing to what extent the agitation for libraries came from below; that is, from the people themselves.

Throughout the report there is abundant evidence as to the reading of the people in general; the reading of the working classes in particular; and, incidentally, the reading of children.

We find that there were no working-class readers to speak of at any of the learned libraries, such as

Chetham's at Manchester, the British Museum, or the Cathedral libraries; nor at the special libraries, most of them theological, such as Dr. Williams' and Sion College. This is what we might expect, because none of the institutions was open during hours convenient for workmen. Like the Chetham librarian, the witnesses assumed that Dr. Williams' and Sion College libraries would be used by workers if the hours were more convenient.

1038.—Do you think from the description of the books, that if any facilities were given to the working classes, they would be likely to avail themselves of the present library? [i.e., Dr. Williams'.]—Yes.

Such optimism is not justified by the actual taste in reading of the artisan classes, although the evidence conflicts on this point, according, one is led to believe, to the speakers' reforming zeal and radical sympathies. The lecturer Dawson maintained that the proportion of historical and philosophical works read was increasing over that of fiction. Again, "the working classes prefer historical and political works; they do not trouble theological works much." As an example of a popular historical work, Froissart's *Chronicles* is cited; as one of a political nature, Coxe's *Revolutions of Europe*, which should have a certain significance to the social historian. Dawson continues to give a rambling survey of the reading, based on his personal experience of labour centres all over the country. In London: "it is a scramble; whoever can get a penny, buys a book." In Birmingham: "there has been a change in the source and the current of the thoughts of the people." In the Staffordshire coal district: "high wages and heavy feeding rather than anything

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intellectual has been the characteristic of the mining population." In Manchester, however: "there is a large class of operative naturalists and a curious set of botanists." Again in Birmingham:

- 1342.—The number of little libraries is immense. There are libraries connected with the church and other institutions, and almost every chapel has some kind of library connected with it. . . . There are some families now beginning to put libraries in their kitchens . . . in several houses they have put up a shelf or two in the kitchen.

While in general:

- 1368.—Political questions are the most interesting to them, and next to those historical subjects, and then perhaps travel and poetry, which is a great deal read, very much indeed, and of course the result is, very much poetry is written by the working people. Anyone connected with a newspaper knows what an enormous flood of poetry the working classes send in in the course of a year. . . . In the newspapers there is a great deal of correspondence from the working people; it is so in Birmingham about all sorts of things.

The optimism and zeal of such reformers are evident and most commendable in view of the almost impenetrable intellectual torpor into which the working classes had fallen before the passing of the Factory Acts. Reference is made in this report to the long hours which they worked, making leisure and reading impossible luxuries for the mass of them. The weavers of Spitalfields, for instance, worked on an average fourteen hours a day, and frequently lived seven or eight in one room, in which "perhaps there will be two looms at

work, so that the noise and discomfort render it almost impossible that a working man, if he were ever so well inclined to read, could sit down and read quietly."

In spite of these conditions, in spite of the illiteracy and lack of opportunity, the labouring classes were, at the time of this report, setting up library centres undoubtedly more suited to their requirements than an officially imposed and semi-philanthropic system. There were, for instance, the libraries of the mechanics' institutes, of which the report lists over four hundred in England and Wales. Some of the institutes, that of Liverpool, for instance, had a membership of over three thousand; a library of fourteen thousand volumes; and a total annual issue of ninety thousand—though this figure sounds rather like the number slain in the battles described by the Roman historians. Now it is essential to recognize in speaking of the mechanics' institutes that they were not, on the whole, working-men's organizations, but were largely in the hands of the middle and lower-middle classes—chiefly of tradesmen. Thus, of the first twenty institutes listed in the Appendix, only five were exclusively devoted to the operative class. It seems that the artisans established for themselves other forms of libraries, more closely adapted to their requirements and habits. Such centres were often set up in public-houses—"there they go, and pay a small subscription, and perhaps take a glass of ale, and read." In competition with the public-houses were the "coffee-shops and reading rooms," these simple eating-houses of workmen having little resemblance to the fashionable social centres of the eighteenth century. There were some two thousand of these "resorts of the sober



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part of the working population " in London alone, and:

2773.—You may go into those places and see a great number of the working classes reading; I am told that somewhere about 500 of them have libraries connected with them; some of these libraries have as many as 2,000 volumes.

One proprietor claimed to have spent £5 a week on papers and periodicals. In some cases " perhaps 1,500 persons pass through one of them in the course of a day—persons mostly of the working classes."

The chief reading material of all these resorts was the periodical literature of the day. We are informed that the *Family Herald* circulated about 125,000 weekly; *Chambers*, from 60,000 to 70,000; and *Eliza Cook's Journal*, from 50,000 to 60,000. These somewhat dreary magazines were accounted a source of great national " uplift," and presumably an antidote against the brutal sports and pastimes of the following variety:

2782.—[Formerly] you might see the working classes of England flocking out into the fields on a Sunday morning, or during a holiday, in their dirt and deshabille, deciding their contests and challenges by pugilistic combats. It was no uncommon thing at that time on taking a Sunday morning's walk, to see about twenty of such fights. Dog-fights and cock-fights were equally common at that time; and at that time what were called " cock-and-hen-clubs " and " free-and-easies " were very common among the working classes.

On the other hand, the working class had an unfortunate habit, from the public library advocate's point of view, of reading works of " a very immoral and

anti-social tendency." A similar objection is lodged by other witnesses. Mr. Corkran, referring to the coffee-shops, says the novels there displayed and loaned were of an inferior kind, and he feared that:

2695.—There has been a large circulation of translations of French novels among the reading classes of the working population of England.

Such books contained "doctrines of a doubtful social character." They had "a very licentious tendency, sufficient to excite evil passions. . . ." They were also "somewhat wild on their theories upon the subject of labour as between masters and men."

On the other hand, according to the lecturer Dawson, the reading preferences of artisans were: political subjects, historical subjects, travel, and poetry, of which they wrote enough "to fill a small room." They were also especially acquainted with Shakespeare and Milton.

It has been pointed out that the chief patrons of the mechanics' institutes were not workmen but tradesmen and small professional men. This is borne out by the evidence of Samuel Smiles:

1956.—The mechanics' institutes in the large towns, generally speaking, are not Institutes of mechanics; they are for the most part Institutes of the middle and respectable classes, and a small proportion, in some cases not so much as half, of working men; a class superior to working men, and a small proportion of working men receiving comparatively high wages, support those institutions. . . . They are not Mechanics' institutes, and it is a misnomer to designate them such.

We can get a pretty faithful picture of their reading from the description of several witnesses who were

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called as experts on the subject. Edward Edwards gave figures for the mechanics' institutes in Lancashire and Cheshire, which unfortunately do not tally with the table given by another witness, J. B. Langley.

The percentage of the population making use of these institutes, as shown in Table II, is suggestive.

TABLE II  
FIGURES FOR SEVEN REPRESENTATIVE MECHANICS'  
INSTITUTES<sup>1</sup>

Institute	Population of Town	Members	Percentage of Population	Volumes	Annual Issue
Bradford ...	34,560	736	2.1	4,342	20,756
Dewsbury ...	10,600	194	1.8	472	1,530
Halifax ...	20,000	302	1.5	2,400	8,707
Huddersfield	25,063	759	3.0	1,400	12,000
Hull ...	66,258	400	0.6	300	3,200
Pudsey ...	10,000	70	0.7	212	1,227
York ...	30,000	636	2.0	3,566	19,679
Average ...	28,068	442.4	1.6	1,813.1	9,585.6

<sup>1</sup> Selected from the *Report on Public Libraries: Appendix No. 2*. (Papers delivered in by Mr. Smiles; [Question 1959.]) Tabular View of the Institutes comprised in . . . The Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutes.

It indicates, indeed, that reading as carried on by the mechanics' institutes, which, it must be remembered, were social centres as well, was small, and in many cases negligible. And in view of this, we must always keep in mind the fact that eight million, or over half of the working population, were illiterate. It was against this social and educational background, however, that the free library was conceived and bestowed upon the public.

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Concerning the value of the mechanics' institutes and their libraries, there is, as one might expect, a diversity of opinion. The Rev. Mr. Hale described them as so many clubs for chess-players and newspaper-readers. Jones, the librarian of the Chetham Library, said:

1194.—The management of those mechanics' institutions is in the hands of a party who buy amusing books, and those who are really disposed to improve themselves have no voice.

and:

1200.—I went [to examine the libraries] a few months ago, and I was quite vexed to find so many works of light literature amongst the recent accessions; instead of imparting knowledge to the people, they can only give the lightest literature of the day.

“The light novels” are also the “same class of books which abound in circulating libraries.” Samuel Smiles admitted that the books principally read were “works of fiction; but a taste for a better description of literature is evidently increasing.”

### 3. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

In spite of the evidence of the report that the reading of the people was both small in quantity and poor in quality, the reformers were insistent on the efficacy of the free library as an improving, ameliorating, and stabilizing institution. And so we are continually brought back by them to the question:

1967.—You think that, as the habit of temperance extends, not only the inclination but the necessity for reading extends with it, as a means of filling up the intervals of leisure which the working people have.

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This consideration caused the advocates of the library cause to ignore the recommendations of the experienced librarians, that a library should have some more definite and functional objective than social reform. What was wanted, in the opinion of these librarians, were special libraries adapted to the need of the locality, such as topographical or occupational libraries. This idea was held by the German, Meyer, and the Italian, Libri; developed by the librarian of Caius College, Cambridge, and by Edward Edwards; and endorsed by all the scholarly librarians called to give evidence.

Unfortunately, however, for the future of libraries, the reformers were only interested in larger social problems, which we can now see were neither within the province nor the ability of libraries to solve. But the attractive idea of a system of free, universal, public libraries caused them to forget that the people were evidently not ready for them, all the more so as half of the working population were semi- or wholly illiterate, and nearly all deprived by labour conditions of sufficient leisure for the proposed literary remedy. In close succession to the confused and indefinite policy came the reactionary legislation of 1850. There was no possibility that the resultant public libraries could satisfy popular reading needs; but they undoubtedly succeeded in deterring the development of the group libraries, by which the workers would probably have worked out their own cultural salvation.

## CHAPTER II

### POPULAR READING AND LIBRARY FACILITIES IN AMERICA DURING THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### I. POPULAR READING, ENGLISH AND AMERICAN, COMPARED

THE state of popular reading and the development of public libraries was much more advanced in the United States than in England at the beginning of the public library movement, if we can accept unconditionally the evidence of the Yale librarian, H. Stevens, who appeared before the British Committee on Public Libraries on May 8th, 1849.<sup>1</sup> This initial assumption is based on two statements, the first of the English lecturer, G. Dawson:

Of course the quantity of people who cannot read and write in this country is a very great hindrance to the demand for books. We have eight millions who cannot write yet.<sup>2</sup>

and the second of the American librarian, H. Stevens:

I never saw an American born who could not read and write, above eight years of age.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix.* Ordered, by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 23 July, 1849, pp. 97-104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Question 1342.

<sup>3</sup> For Stevens' evidence used here and in subsequent quotations, see

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Moreover, the evidence of Stevens concerning the principal contemporary sources of popular reading, the mechanics' institutes, would suggest that they were in a much more flourishing state than their English counterparts. It has been shown in the first chapter that English opinion as to the efficacy and even the desirability of these institutes was divided; all the American evidence implies that they were both numerous and beneficial in the United States. According to Stevens, they were to be found:

. . . in all the large towns; that is, in towns of 5,000 inhabitants and upwards.

Further:

They are all very well attended. . . . Chiefly in the cities by clerks, apprentices, mechanics, and those engaged in active business during the day. Females generally outnumber the males.

Another source of working-class reading in the States was the libraries attached to factories; as Stevens described them, "they are public libraries to which the operatives have easy access." It must be added that these libraries were not tax supported; they were subscription libraries for whose privileges the operatives (and any other member of the community) paid the not inconsiderable sum of six or eight shillings a year.<sup>1</sup> An exception was the "new town of Laurence" where Stevens believed "the library is quite free to the operatives."

In the case of the English mechanics' institutes, Jones, the librarian of the Chetham library, had

the first footnote on page 21. It may be observed in reference to this quotation that Stevens had evidently moved only in cultivated society.

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Question 1678. Stevens quotes the exchange value.

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indicated that the libraries were "in the hands of a party who buy amusing books, and those who are really disposed to improve themselves have no voice. . . ." <sup>1</sup> By contrast, the American institutes, in the opinion of Stevens, resulted in "populations distinguished for good order and propriety of conduct." This is ascribed to the opportunities of free access to books, debating societies, lyceums, reading rooms, and lectures. One American institute achieved something of an international reputation, namely, that of Lowell, Massachusetts:

. . . there is a celebrated association at Lowell called the "Improvement Circle" to which any factory girl belonging to any of the mills may become a member by subscribing her name to the constitution, and furnishing an original article on any subject she pleases, of any length she pleases, once a month. From these contributions thus offered a selection is made by one or two of the girls, who have been elected editors, and compose a monthly periodical of 24 octavo pages. They are now, I believe, on the 8th or 9th volume.

The *Lowell Offering* calls itself "a repository of original articles," <sup>2</sup> although they can only be termed "original" in that they are the productions of working-class women whose language is extraordinarily elegant and polysyllabic in contrast to the factory workers of to-day. The magazine consists of essays on such well-bred topics as Virtue, Love, Friendship, and the like; short stories on any theme other than mill life; and poems in the manner of Eliza Cook.

The American institutes, however, were not unique

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Question 1194.

<sup>2</sup> The *Lowell Offering*; original articles, written exclusively by females actively employed in the mills (Lowell, Mass.), 1840-6.



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in producing and encouraging working-class authors. The lecturer Dawson, speaks of the essays, correspondence, and poetry, of which the English workers wrote enough "to fill a small room . . . although it is a compliment to call it poetry."<sup>1</sup> There were also various mechanics' magazines which contained besides the conventional literary materials of the *Lowell Offering*, some articles of a more scholarly and some of a more controversial nature. There were very few women contributors.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN LIBRARIES

The direct evidence concerning the reading of the American working classes seems scant from an examination of Stevens' data, but it is well to remember that class distinctions were not so clearly demarcated in this country as in England. There was not (and is not) a "working class" in the sense that the classification is used throughout the English Report; that is, a great body of uneducated and unskilled artisans newly drafted into the factories as a result of the industrial revolution. America was also undergoing an industrial revolution, but the theory of society being more essentially democratic, it was not productive of such social inequalities and hardships for the workers. "This very numerous and interesting portion of the population," as M. W. Libri, the Italian witness, terms the English workers,<sup>3</sup> could all presumably read

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chapter I, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The *Mechanics' Magazine*, for instance, published at London, 1823-72. The comparable American publication was the *Mechanics' Mirror*, published at Albany, 1846-?.

<sup>3</sup> *Report, op. cit.*, p. 121\*.

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and write in America, and as one member of the committee states:

I apprehend, as a general rule, the working classes in America are in better circumstances than the working classes of England.

which led Stevens to observe:

It strikes an American very forcibly in coming to England to see how little reading there is among labouring and business classes.

If we can assume, then, that there was in America no sharp social distinction between the artisan and professional classes, due to the educational opportunities available to all, as well as to the democratic tradition of the country, we can infer that there was not the same urgency in the two nations for free public libraries especially intended for the enlightenment of the working classes. This conclusion is supported by the fact that every school district in New England and New York had a library which was public,<sup>1</sup> and these facilities were used as much by the working classes as by any other group. The evidence of the English librarians of the learned and society libraries was in direct contrast to this,<sup>2</sup> the principal reasons given for the non-use of these institutions being the unfavourable hours which they were open. Consequently, those artisans who could read, probably less than 50 per cent. of the working-class population; and of these, those who had sufficient leisure and inclination to do so,

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Question 1657.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the evidence of the librarian of Archbishop Tenison's library, of Dr. Williams' library, of Archbishop Marsh's library, of the Sion College library, and of the university libraries. *Report*, *passim*.

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were obliged to make their own provision for reading, hence the unique phenomenon of the English coffee-shop and public-house libraries. So that the whole American library system in comparison no doubt merited the praise of the Commission to the effect that:

. . . our younger brethren, the people of the United States of America, have already anticipated us in the formation of Public Libraries. It appears that there are about 100 such institutions; of these, a large proportion are entirely open to the public. Almost every State has its Public Library, supported by a vote of the State Legislature.<sup>1</sup>

It may be noted in passing that the purpose and function of the state libraries were evidently misunderstood by the Commission, if they assumed that these legislative reference institutions were public in the sense of recreational. Edward Edwards, therefore, was more specific when he wrote:

Americans have already reason to be proud of the extent of their establishments in this kind, destined for public advantage, and especially for the furtherance of popular education.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. TYPES OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LIBRARIES

It is now proposed to touch upon the general library resources of the United States at this time before concluding with a cursory examination of the contemporary American idea of a public library and its objectives.

Any consideration of the number and sizes of the mid-nineteenth century libraries is complicated by the

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, p. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

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conflicting data, for the figures of Stevens, Edwards, and Jewett are all three at variance, and it is necessary to take the discrepancies into account in any impartial consideration of the subject. Jewett<sup>1</sup> and Stevens, however, agree closely as to the types of library, which have been classified and arranged as follows:

(a) National libraries:

1. Library of Congress.
2. The Smithsonian Institution.
3. State libraries.

(b) Educational libraries:

4. University.
5. College.
6. Academy and professional school libraries.
7. Students' libraries "formed by students . . . for mutual improvement in debate and composition."<sup>2</sup>
8. Public school or school district libraries.

(c) Libraries of societies and associations:

9. Learned societies.
10. Mechanics' institutes.
11. Mercantile.
12. Apprentice libraries.

(d) Ecclesiastical libraries:

13. Church or congregational libraries.
14. Sunday school libraries.

(e) Subscription libraries:

15. Joint-stock libraries.
16. Municipal libraries.

<sup>1</sup> C. C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America* (Washington, D.C. : Printed by order of Congress . . . for the House of Representatives, 1851), p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE FIRST PUBLIC LIBRARIES

It will be noted that nearly all of these libraries have a specific purpose and a clearly defined field of service, inasmuch as each one of them was designed to serve the needs and interest of a particular clientele in comparison with the wider and more general patronage of the subsequent public library. The prevailing type is manifestly the educational library, and the stated objectives of others, such as the church and Sunday school libraries, are likewise intellectual as well as moral. Jewett refers to the Sunday school libraries as containing:

. . . books, though mostly for juvenile readers . . . always of a moral or religious tendency, and they have vast influence in forming the intellectual as well as the moral character of the people.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly the public school libraries "are composed of valuable books, designed and adapted to communicate useful knowledge in a popular way, and to cultivate all the higher elements of character."<sup>2</sup> Not even the mechanics' institutes made provision for light, recreational reading to any great extent, although it is quite evident, exactly as it is with the reading of the English workers, that the preference was for the fiction of the day. To the question of the member of the committee:

Can you give a . . . description of books which the working classes borrow from public libraries; are they historical, or books of general literature, or novels?

Stevens replied:

Very miscellaneous; history, biography, travels and a great deal of fiction.

<sup>1</sup> C. C. Jewett, *Notices of Public Libraries in the United States of America*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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This statement is supported by Jewett's data, the Library of the Young Men's Association at Buffalo lending 14,200 volumes during the year 1848, of which 38 per cent. were fiction; 36 per cent. history, biography, travels, etc.; 17 per cent. standard literature; and 9 per cent. science—figures which show a trend towards the still larger proportion of fiction circulated in a modern public library.

It is equally evident, however, that no librarian of the time and none of the advocates of the early library movement thought it necessary to satisfy this public need by an indiscriminate supply of popular fiction. This was held to be the function of the circulating libraries, the joint-stock libraries, and the subscription libraries, of which there was an enormous number. The modern public library itself, which is arbitrarily dated from the establishment of the Boston Public Library in 1852, was conceived as a place

. . . to which the young people of both sexes, when they leave the schools, can resort for those works which pertain to general culture, or which are needful for research into any branch of useful knowledge. . . .<sup>1</sup>

while the social objective is thus stated:

. . . that the means of general information should be so diffused that the largest possible number of persons should be induced to read and understand questions going down to the very foundations of social order . . . and which we, as a people, are constantly required to decide, and to decide either ignorantly or wisely.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, it is known that the historian Ticknor advocated a policy of:

<sup>1</sup> *Report of . . . the Public Library, July 1852*, City Document, No. 37 (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, printer, 1852), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

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. . . popular books, tending to moral and intellectual improvement . . . furnished in such numbers of copies that many persons can be reading the same book at the same time; in short . . . the pleasant literature of the day shall be made accessible to the whole people when they most care for it, that is, when it is fresh and new.<sup>1</sup>

These words of Ticknor and the interpretation of them started a controversy which has gone on ever since, and is still discussed officially or privately at every library conference. The present writer, however, is concerned primarily with the historical evidence, on the one hand of popular reading, and on the other of the initial objectives of the public library, not omitting the relation of one to the other. It is certain enough that by "pleasant literature of the day" Ticknor meant fiction, and his recommendation for making it accessible is thus incorporated in the first public library report of 1852.

Books should be provided in such numbers, that *many* persons, if they desire it, can be reading the same work at the same moment, and so render the pleasant and healthy literature of the day accessible to the whole people at the only time they care for it—when it is living, fresh and new. Additional copies, therefore, of any book in this class should continue to be bought almost as long as they are urgently demanded, and thus, by following the popular taste—unless it should ask for something unhealthy—we may hope to create a real desire for general reading.<sup>2</sup>

It is equally certain, moreover, that Ticknor's stipulation "tending to moral and intellectual improvement" is not an empty phrase, but a conviction

<sup>1</sup> *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor* (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1876).

<sup>2</sup> *Report of . . . the Public Library, op. cit.*, p. 17.

## READING IN AMERICA IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

by which he justified the taxation of society for the distribution of popular literature. This objective reappears as a concrete policy in the clause cited above, and is worded as follows:

The Trustees would endeavour to make the Public Library of the City, as far as possible, the crowning glory of our system of City Schools; or in other words, they would make it an institution fitted to continue and increase the best effects of that system by opening to all the means of self-culture through books, for which these schools have been specially qualifying them.<sup>1</sup>

We must stop at this point, having hinted the nature and scope of the subsequent problem. This is dealt with more specifically in Chapters IV and V.

<sup>1</sup> *Report of . . . the Public Library, op. cit.*, p. 21.



## CHAPTER III

TRENDS IN THE BRITISH PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT  
DURING THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

## I. GROWTH OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES AFTER THE ACT OF 1850

MINTO observes: "Town councils . . . did not display any undue eagerness to avail themselves of the powers with which the Act entrusted them."<sup>1</sup> It is further evident that the popular demand for public libraries was still not great, judging from the evidence of the polls. In 1850, a poll of the Norwich burgesses was taken, when 150 voted in favour and 7 against the adoption of the Act,<sup>2</sup> a total of 157 in a city of several thousands. Interest was so slight, indeed, that no active measures were taken to enforce the adoption of the Act until seven years later. The slowness with which authorities availed themselves of the opportunity for establishing a library is deplored as late as 1886 by Greenwood, who remarks:

Notwithstanding the Public Libraries Acts having been in operation since 1850, only one hundred and thirty-three towns have availed themselves of these useful institutions. Even of this number, small as it is when compared with

<sup>1</sup> J. Minto, *History of the Public Library Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Allen and Unwin and the Library Association, 1932), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## BRITISH LIBRARY IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

the very large number of populous towns and districts, it has to be, when statistics are minutely examined, discounted, for some included in the hundred given are really not free libraries at all.<sup>1</sup>

The numerical growth of public libraries is set out in Fig. 1.<sup>2</sup>

This graph is more or less self-explanatory. The peak is reached during the period 1900-5, 1903 being the record year with thirty-nine authorities adopting the Acts and proceeding to establish libraries. As we have explained elsewhere, this "boom" in the erection of libraries was directly due in the majority of cases to a generous Carnegie grant, although some authorities failed at first to ascertain whether there was an immediate need for a public library; and, secondly, whether a library rate limited to one penny in the pound would yield sufficient income to support such an establishment efficiently. In a few cases, the authorities were soon to realize that they had obligated themselves to support an institution whose upkeep was beyond their resources. There are examples of libraries whose building was erected on a £10,000 Carnegie grant, and which later could afford only £1 a year out of the total library income for books. Of the rest, the librarian received £140, while £67 17s. went toward building loans and upkeep. In such cases, all cultural, educational, and popular objectives had to be set aside for the time in an effort to retain even a library building and personnel. In one instance, no doubt an

<sup>1</sup> T. Greenwood, *Free Public Libraries*. 1st ed. (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1886), pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Public Libraries Committee, *Report on Public Libraries in England and Wales*. Presented . . . to Parliament by Command of His Majesty, May, 1927 (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1927).

## BOOK SELECTION

exceptional one, the situation is thus summed up by the librarian:

Since 1908, I have devoted myself not to the library but to the finances. I have kept down every expenditure and ignored our requirements. Every member of the staff is underpaid.<sup>1</sup>

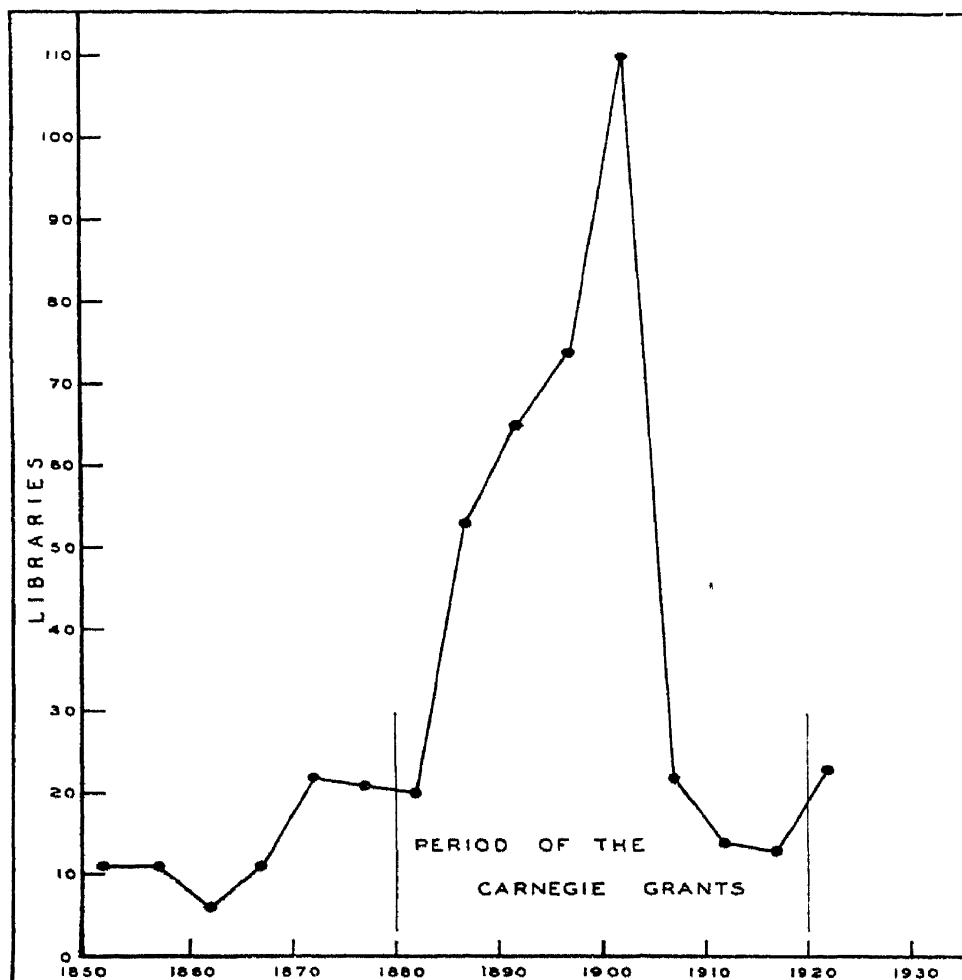


FIG. 1. Growth of Public Libraries in England and Wales, 1850-1925.

<sup>1</sup> W. G. S. Adams, *A Report on Library Provision and Policy to the*

However, these unfortunate examples of the public's negligence of their library opportunities do not detract from the main achievement of the Carnegie endowments, which was to make the general public conscious of the advantages and privileges of a library and to give libraries themselves an opportunity to demonstrate those advantages. Where the experiment failed, as it seems to have done in impoverished or retarded communities, it was not the fault of the idea or of the library donor, but of certain unfavourable conditions, which will usually hinder any form of social development.

It would be an interesting study to compare the curve of Fig. 1 with the various economic indices of national status over the same period of time. An analysis of statistical abstracts shows, for instance, that the rapid growth of libraries was paralleled by an increase in the national prosperity as indicated by such criteria as imperial revenue and expenditure, income tax, property charged with estate, imports and exports, etc.<sup>1</sup> None the less, any correlation that there might be would be more incidental than causal; for, on the whole, the public library is not a national institution except in so far as it is incorporated in the *corpus juris*: in origin and development it was, and still is, a peculiarly local phenomenon, so that a more significant correlation would take account of this consideration, and compare the growth of public libraries with local rather than with national prosperity.

*Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees* (Edinburgh : Printed by Neill & Co., 1915). Appendix IV.

<sup>1</sup> *Statistical Abstract for the United Kingdom* (London : Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1850-1925).

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### 2. IMMEDIATE CAUSES FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY EXPANSION

The first of the direct incentives to the development of public libraries was undoubtedly the Act of 1855, which extended the provisions for their establishment to boroughs, districts, and parishes of 5,000 population and above instead of 10,000 and above as permitted by the original Act of 1850; and which raised the rate from one halfpenny to one penny in the pound.<sup>1</sup> This evidently had no immediate result in promoting libraries, for the number established within the next seven years or so was less than before, this fact again implying that the people, in so far as they were represented by the municipal and other authorities, were not necessarily eager to avail themselves of the opportunities thus enlarged and extended to them. Ten years later, however, libraries began to be established more frequently, until another paradoxical setback seemed to result from what was an obvious incentive to their growth, namely, the Compulsory Education Act of 1870. This decline may have been due to the reaction which followed such a radical measure, termed "socialistic" by its opponents,<sup>2</sup> and to the additional burden on the local rates.

After 1883 there followed a rapid and continuous growth in the number of libraries established. Several new Acts, such as that of 1877 which permitted voters to express their opinion as well by ballot as by public meeting, proved advantageous to the library movement. The gradual effects of compulsory education in lessening illiteracy also strengthened the cause, and the

<sup>1</sup> Act of 18-19 Vict., c. 70.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, M. D. O'Brien, "Free Libraries," T. Mackay (ed.), *A Plea for Liberty* (London: J. Murray, 1894), IX, 261-2.

## BRITISH LIBRARY IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

friends of libraries were strong in Parliament, judging from the number of Acts introduced in their favour.<sup>1</sup> Then in the last decade of the nineteenth century came the impetus of the Carnegie grants, followed by a period of apathy, in which many libraries with expensive buildings were both understocked and understaffed—a period from which, in consequence, it has taken many years for the British system to recover, although the opportunity to do so was provided by the Act of 1919, which finally removed the rate limitation.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. ATTITUDE OF THE WORKING CLASSES TOWARDS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

It is one of the primary purposes of this historical study to see to what extent public libraries were the outcome of popular needs; to what extent they were demanded from below, as well as being advocated from above. The first library to be established in England, in the year 1852, the Manchester Public Library, seems to have come into being through the enthusiasm and energy of a group of scholarly and benevolent citizens rather than through the requests of the lower and middle classes, who in any case were more or less inarticulate. The suggestion was made by John Watts, Ph.D., and “discussed by a number of influential people.”<sup>3</sup> A subscription for the promotion of the design was raised, and £4,300 collected before any appeal was made to the public. Finally, with the

<sup>1</sup> A. R. Hewitt, *The Law Relating to Public Libraries in England and Wales* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1930), Table of Statutes, pp. xv-xix.

<sup>2</sup> The Public Libraries Act, 1919, 9-10 Geo. V, c. 93.

<sup>3</sup> W. R. Credland, *Manchester Public Free Libraries* (Manchester: Printed . . . by T. Sowler & Sons, 1899), p. 2.

## BOOK SELECTION

plans already drawn up and a subscription of £12,823, the opinion of the ratepayers was sought at the polls. Of an electorate of 12,500, exactly 4,002 voted—3,962 in favour; 40 against, implying that two-thirds of the electorate were, for reasons unknown, not prepared to vote on the issue. Among such reasons, indifference may have been one.

It is difficult to estimate the part played by working men in the establishment of the Manchester Library. A committee of working men was formed,<sup>1</sup> and the workers were solicited for subscriptions. Twenty-two thousand workers contributed £813 18s. Against this concrete evidence of the workers' interest is the secretary's regret concerning:

. . . the lukewarm feeling and very great coldness with which a [*sic*] many of their fellow workmen have received their addresses and even refused to contribute their mite towards the consummation of this great object.<sup>2</sup>

The "very great coldness" is easily understood in view of the illiteracy which prevailed among the working classes until the passing of the Elementary Education Act in 1870.

We may obtain a clear idea of how British public libraries were established from an examination of Greenwood's chapter on "The Education of Public Opinion for the Adoption of the Act."<sup>3</sup> He contends:

The ball might, in the first instance, be set rolling by some prominent townsman in a letter to the local press. . . . Second in influence I would place clergymen, and other ministers of the gospel, Sunday and day-school teachers.

<sup>1</sup> Credland, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Greenwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-53.

## BRITISH LIBRARY IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

It is notable that he lists among the enemies of the movement "the working classes, who very often are not particularly anxious for the adoption of Free Libraries." Finally, in support of this fact, the evidence shows that no working-class district of London had established a public library until 1885, Greenwood reporting:

Efforts have been made in Hackney, Finsbury, Camberwell, St. Pancras, and other parts of London . . . but defeat has been the result.<sup>1</sup>

In view of the findings in this section, one may be permitted to ask whether the popular origins and the popular demand which are frequently ascribed to the public library have not sometimes been overstated. The idea seems rather to have been promoted by a progressive and socially minded minority, who were able in the first instances to establish libraries by skilful organization, and authorities later followed suit partly from a sense of public spirit. Library buildings, often unsuited architecturally to their function, were erected, though they were prevented from maintaining an efficient service on account of the severe budget limitations. And this obstacle to efficient service was tolerated by the majority of the authorities and the people for nearly seventy years, and it was once more left to an educated and energetic minority to improve the conditions of the popular institution.

### 4. CHANGES IN THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

It was concluded from our analysis of the working-class reading conditions in England at the beginning

<sup>1</sup> Greenwood, *op. cit.*, p. 216.



## BOOK SELECTION

of the public library movement that the principal value of public libraries in the opinion of the advocates of the movement was the beneficial influence they would exert as a means of social and moral reform. The conviction that the public library could attract readers away from the public-house is urged again and again by the upholders of the movement during the nineteenth century. Greenwood prefaces his "Free Public Libraries" with an illustration featuring the "Red Lion" public-house in the left cartouche and the Free Library and Institute in the right.<sup>1</sup> The "Red Lion" announces "Bagatelle, Billiards"; the Library, "Lending Library and Reading Rooms." Outside of the public-house stands a loafer with his back to the wall as he gazes into space, whereas into the public library march two upright citizens with umbrellas and silk hats. Underneath the engraving is the caption: "The Rivals. Which shall it be?"

This illustration serves as a summary of one trend of argument in favour of the public library. It will be remembered, moreover, that it re-echoes the conditions of the first advocates of libraries at the time of the government inquiry in 1849.<sup>2</sup> Nor was the reformers' concern as to the inebriety of the working classes in any way unjustified, for all the evidence points to the intemperance which they deplore. An American observer, William Clarke, writing for the *New England Magazine* in 1896 says:

There is a good deal of drunkenness, though this I believe to be a declining factor all over England. The

<sup>1</sup> Greenwood, *op. cit.*, frontispiece.

<sup>2</sup> *Report from the Select Committee on Public Libraries; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendix.* Ordered, by the House of Commons, to be Printed, 23 July, 1849.

## BRITISH LIBRARY IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Labour Commission has recently reported a diminution of drunkenness all over the rural districts, and my own observation tells me that there is less in London than when I was a boy. Still, when compared with French and German cities, this vice is conspicuous in London, especially on holidays. . . . I have seen fifty drunken people in a walk of a mile and half on a weekly Saturday half holiday, hundreds of times over.<sup>1</sup>

In view of this evidence, we can better understand such statements as this of Sir Trevor Lawrence: "Public Libraries, moreover, supply, in the best form, an antidote or counter-attraction to the allurements of the public-house."<sup>2</sup> Sir John Lubbock considered it was better "to spend our money in libraries and schools than on prisons."<sup>3</sup>

It was not long before the emphasis was shifted away from the reformatory influence of the public library to its educational significance. Prior to 1870, the year of the Compulsory Educational Act, there was not much point in urging the educational advantages of the public library to the working classes, since only a small minority of them were able to read at all. For instance, the census of 1851 shows that of 69,500 children between the ages of 3 and 14 then living in Manchester, 30,100 were neither at school nor at work; 7,000 were at work and 32,400 at school. Therefore, more than half of the *whole* younger generation of Manchester were probably illiterate, and since upper and middle-class children are all included in these figures, we may infer that nearly all of the working class were unschooled. Under these

<sup>1</sup> William Clarke, "The Life of the London Working Classes," *New England Magazine*, July 1894, p. 581.

<sup>2</sup> Greenwood, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

## BOOK SELECTION

conditions the principal recommendation of the public libraries could hardly be other than that:

. . . they could divert the attention of the people of this county from the public-house, gin-shops, beer-shops . . . and enable them to cultivate not only the intellect, but the moral faculties of the people and thus diminish crime and its evils throughout the land.<sup>1</sup>

After 1870, however, or, at least, long enough afterwards for the Compulsory Education Act to have had some effect, the advocates of the library began to emphasize the educational aspects, so that by the end of the century we hear references to libraries "having for their object the enlargement and the extension of adult education."<sup>2</sup>

### 5. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The prevailing attitude towards the public library was found to affect its aims and objectives and, to a certain extent, its book selection. It could not, however, materially affect the reading interests of the people, and these, judging from indirect evidence, continued to be much the same as before. This was the most powerful argument of the opponents of free libraries, and one which is nowhere directly answered.

The point of view is thus expressed by O'Brien, a bitter and sometimes abusive critic of free libraries, which he defines as a "socialistic collection of unjustly gotten books":

That poor women and others, who are often the sole support of a large family of children, should have their hard earnings confiscated to maintain readers—many of them well-to-do—in gratuitous literature, is an injustice

<sup>1</sup> Credland, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

not to be tolerated by all the hollow cant about culture and education so freely indulged in at the present time. . . .

It is hardly necessary for us to say that we have no objection, either for ourselves or for our neighbours, to novel-reading. On the contrary, we regard it as a legitimate form of recreation. All we argue is that it is not a luxury which should be paid for out of the rates. Now, to listen to the advocates of Free Libraries, one would imagine that these institutions were only frequented by students, and that the books borrowed were for the most part of a profound and scholarly character. But the very reverse of this is the case.<sup>1</sup>

He then goes on to analyse the issue of several libraries, and expresses considerable indignation at the high percentage of fiction. In twenty-three libraries, the lowest percentage of fiction issued is 48·82; the highest, 88·02; the average, 68·89; which leads O'Brien to the characteristic conclusion that:

. . . these places are largely used by well-to-do and other idlers. . . . Free Libraries are perfect "god-sends" to the town loafer, who finds himself housed and amused at the public expense, and may lounge away his time among the intellectual luxuries which his neighbours are taxed to provide for him. Says Mr. Mullins, the Birmingham librarian, "No delicacy seems to deter the poor tramp from using, not only the news-room, but the best seats in the reference library *for a snooze*."<sup>2</sup>

Such arguments as these—and they are still being used to-day—could be further strengthened at that period by reference to the extraordinary cheapness and abundance of both the classics and contemporary novels. It was not an exaggeration to say that every man, including the worker, could easily have provided his own recreational reading and collected his own

<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 270.

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library in doing so. This was made possible by the popular series in which the publishers of the day specialized. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge was carrying on its educational campaign; Messrs. Dicks were putting out a complete edition of Scott's novels at threepence a volume; the classics—*Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Rasselas*, *Paul and Virginia*, etc., etc.—were twopence each; and Shakespeare's plays a penny each. Cassell's National Library published 208 of the "world's best books," each book containing some 200 pages, at threepence each, with a discount of 25 per cent. when four or more were purchased at the same time. The series included ancient and foreign authors. Shakespeare's plays were put out with an explanatory introduction, containing among other material of value to the student, the poem, story, or previous drama which the dramatist had used as a source. The usual price of modern novels was about fourpence halfpenny, and although all of these sums represent a greater purchasing value than they do to-day, O'Brien has a certain amount of justification for concluding:

. . . it will not do to say that the best kind of literature is unpurchasable by a class that spends millions a year on alcohol, as well as thousands on tobacco and other luxuries. Three or four pence, which even comparatively poor people think nothing now-a-days of spending on an ounce of tobacco or a pipe, will buy enough of the best literature to last an ordinary reader at least a week or a fortnight.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed, indeed, in view of the cheapness of standard literature and even of light fiction (in paper-covered editions, magazines, etc.) that the English public library would have developed more on the lines

<sup>1</sup> O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

BRITISH LIBRARY IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY of the continental type of institution which had been recommended in the first stages of the movement by the most authoritative witnesses. For:

What was wanted, in the opinion of these librarians, were special libraries adapted to the need of the locality, such as topographical or occupational libraries.<sup>1</sup>

The best that librarians could answer to indictments such as O'Brien's was that the public would eventually be weaned from their partiality for cheap fiction to an appreciation of good literature. In the meantime, in spite of the educational objectives of the movement and the efforts of librarians, the libraries themselves were used principally as free sources of the lightest of contemporary fiction, which was, incidentally, the most expensive type of popular publications—and used, moreover, by a mere fraction of the population. Table III gives the figures for five libraries chosen at random.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE III  
STATISTICS FOR FIVE LIBRARIES

Place	Population (1891)	No. of Borrowers	Per cent. of Population	Per cent. of Fiction	Annual Expendi- ture
Croydon ...	102,697	8,409	8.19	75	£ 2,100
Derby ...	94,146	7,000	7.44	80	1,500
Exeter ...	37,580	1,196	3.18	78	720
Gosport ...	25,457	920	3.61	85	270
Hanley ...	54,846	1,881	3.43	79	737
Total ...	314,726	19,406	6.17	79.4	£5,327

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Chap. I, sec. 3, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> T. Greenwood, *Public Libraries*. Fourth ed. (London, Cassell, 1894), p. 550.

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If these figures imply anything at all, they suggest that the libraries had not been eminently successful either as an "antidote" to undesirable proletarian activities or as a means of adult education: for they reveal that nearly 94 per cent. of the population of these five towns were independent of, or indifferent to, the library; and that only one-fifth of the remaining 6 per cent., about 200 out of 20,000, were using the library in a manner conformable with a programme of adult education.

## CHAPTER IV

### TRENDS IN THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

#### I. NUMERICAL GROWTH OF LIBRARIES

FIGURE 2 indicates the growth of urban public libraries in the United States over a period of some eighty years.<sup>1</sup> The graph only shows a part of the expansion, however, as the libraries of universities, schools, corporations, and counties have not been included, although many of them are both public and free in the same sense as the city and town libraries. The figures for all types of library are available and are appended herewith for comparison.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE IV  
UNITED STATES LIBRARIES REPORTING THREE  
THOUSAND VOLUMES OR MORE

Libraries Classified as to Control	1923	1929	Per cent. of Increase or Decrease
National Government ...	72	56	-22.22
State ... ..	177	135	-23.73
County ... ..	121	141	+16.53
City ... ..	1,263	1,442	+14.17
Township, Town, Village, or Borough ... ..	725	895	+23.45

<sup>1</sup> *Statistics of Public, Society, and School Libraries*, 1929. Bulletin No. 37, 1930 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



## BOOK SELECTION

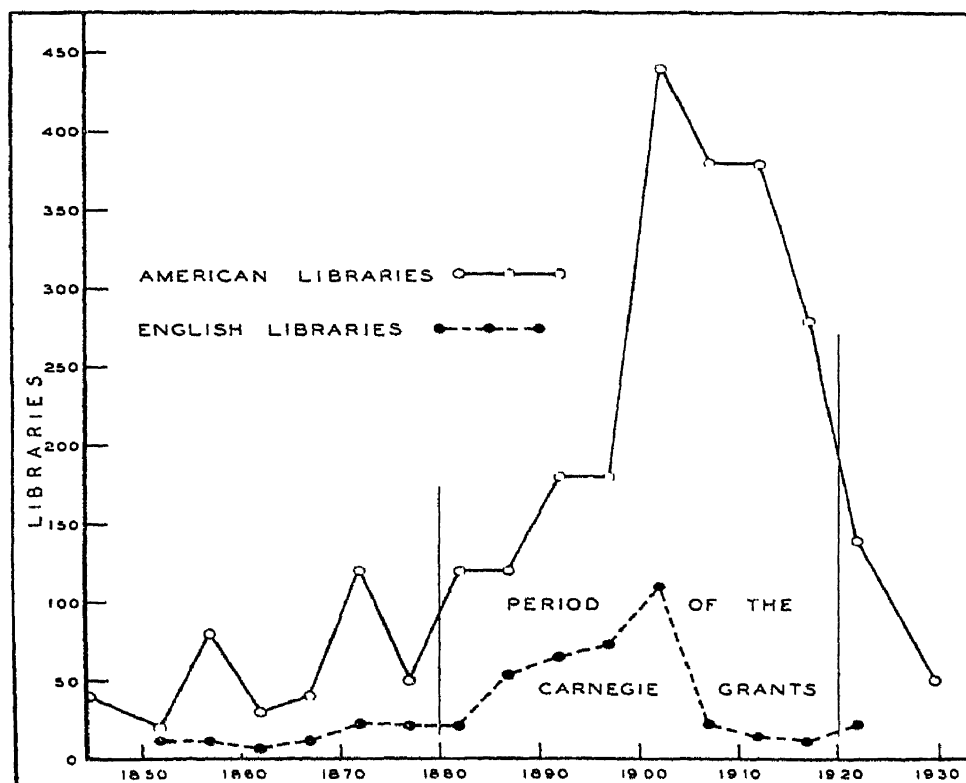


FIG. 2. Growth of Free Public Libraries in Cities, Towns, Boroughs and Villages of the United States; and a comparison with the growth of English Public Libraries.

The loose resemblance between the two curves in Fig. 2, and that in spite of the mean differences, is a most interesting aspect of American and English library development. In both countries there was, prior to the Carnegie grants, a tendency towards expansion, though with more fluctuations in the case of American libraries than of the English whose setbacks, however, are more apparent from the larger scale of Fig. 1. About 1890, the full force not only

of the actual Carnegie grants, but also of the favourable attitude towards libraries thus inspired begins to be felt, and from that year there is a sharp upward trend, with the period 1900 to 1905 attaining the peak in both cases. After 1903, the decline is even more rapid than the rise, until 1920 or thereabouts, when there is a new upward movement in both countries.

Apart from suggesting a cause and effect relationship between the period of the Carnegie grants and the rapid expansion of the library system in the United States as a whole, no attempt will be made to postulate the *national* causes for the fluctuations and trends in the American curve, although some such factors were indicated for the English scene. It is very necessary to remember that the American and British systems are not comparable in respect of both being national institutions. The American public library has originated and developed more or less independently in different states without the binding and consolidating tendency of a common legislative history. It is, therefore, something of an inaccuracy to speak of the history of the American public library without reference to some particular phase of the movement; and the phase this study is concerned with is one which, in contrast to the legislative or institutional aspects, has had a common development. It is the social theory of the public library. Therefore, in the following analysis of trends the emphasis will be upon the functions, the objectives, and the philosophy of the public library in general, on the assumption that they are in many respects common to the whole nation, notwithstanding such divisive factors as the independent legislation of the different states.

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### 2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FIRST AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The first report of the Boston Public Library announces that the major objective of the institution is "to continue the system of education in Boston." For:

Although the school and even the college and university are, as all thoughtful persons are well aware, but the first stages in education, the public makes no provision for carrying on the great work. It imparts, with a noble equality of privilege, a knowledge of the elements of learning to all its children, but it affords them no aid in going beyond the elements. It awakens a taste for reading, but it furnishes to the public nothing to read. It conducts our young men and women to that point where they are qualified to acquire from books the various knowledge in the arts and sciences which books contain; but it does nothing to put those books within their reach.<sup>1</sup>

The trustees proposed to remedy this deficiency by supplying four classes of books, viz.:

- i. Books that cannot be taken out of the library;
- ii. Books that few persons will wish to read;
- iii. Books that will often be asked for (we mean, the more respectable of the popular books of the time);
- iv. Periodical publications, probably excluding newspapers, except such as may be given by their proprietors.<sup>2</sup>

The *immediate* purpose of the library, and the one which later public librarians have unduly stressed, was to encourage reading by means of concessions to popular taste; the *ultimate* purpose, once the popular reading standards were raised, was to make the institution:

<sup>1</sup> *Report of . . . the Public Library, July 1852*, City Document No. 37 (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, printer, 1852), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19.

## AMERICAN LIBRARY DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY

. . . a great and rich library for men of science, statesmen and scholars, as well as for the great body of the people.<sup>1</sup>

These expectations are re-echoed in almost every report for the next fifteen years; that of 1854, for instance, in speaking of duplicate copies of popular books, is reassured by the hope

. . . that for a certain class of books this demand will be temporary, and that in due time—sooner for some and later for others—all but a single copy, or very few copies may be dispensed with. In the meantime, however, the books will have performed their office; the taste and habit of reading will have been cultivated; and if the expectations of the trustees are realized, the standard of the reading community will have been steadily raised, and the class of new books called for will become more and more one of permanent value.<sup>2</sup>

Nor at the time was this objective merely a groundless belief but, judging from the report of 1867, its effects were being felt in the book selection of that period. The principle advocated by the originators of the Boston Library was now put into practice, as it was considered popular wants had been duly recognized and served by a collection of 30,000 volumes; and:

. . . it began to be felt that there were particular classes of our citizens, apart from the general body, whose wants deserved recognition. So about that time we find that books in the foreign tongues began to be added,

<sup>1</sup> *Report, op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Second Annual Report of the . . . Public Library*, City Document No. 74 (Boston: In Board of Mayor and Aldermen, November 6th, 1854), p. 5.

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and the higher departments of literature more fully developed.<sup>1</sup>

The policy of the New Bedford city library instituted by an ordinance of the council in August 1852, and opened to the public in March 1853, shows a similar trend. The first annual report refers to "the two-fold object of the institution, the combination of rational enjoyment with intellectual and moral culture"; and later:

Our Free Public Library is one of that series of instrumentalities which the people, in the exercise of a clear perception of their wants and their duties, have ordained to exist, as the means of an enlightened culture, and for the attainment of that moral and intellectual elevation in which communities and individuals are to find happiness and safety.<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years later, these views of the educational purpose of the library were still being upheld, exactly as they were in the case of the Boston Public Library. The report for 1874 says:

. . . our library is part of our system of public education and the complement of our educational arrangements; and as they have seen no limit to the work of education short of that training which embraces all the faculties and powers of our humanity, they have, as far as it has been within their reach, endeavoured to make upon the institution under their care the impress of this high conception of man's wants and capacity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fifteenth Annual Report of the . . . Public Library*, City Document No. 114 (Boston: Mudge and Son, 1867), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *First Annual Report of the . . . New Bedford City Library*, City Document, March 1853 (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1853), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Twenty-second Annual Report of the . . . Free Public Library of New Bedford* (New Bedford: Anthony and Sons, 1874), p. 11.

## AMERICAN LIBRARY DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY

### 3. CHANGES IN THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

By 1876, the year of the government report,<sup>1</sup> the tax-supported public library had emerged in its modern form, and the transitional stages of the 'fifties when the library was coloured by the policy and nature of the learned and school libraries were behind. Fletcher, in describing for the report alluded to above the public libraries in manufacturing communities, says:

A great deal will be gained in the direction of interesting the public in the library and in its intelligent use, if it is made apparent that the management of the library is actively in sympathy with the popular department, and makes that the object of its chief solicitude. If, on the other hand, the librarian withdraws himself to the seclusion of a private office, and devotes his efforts to the collection and building up of a library which shall conform to his personal ideas of excellence rather than to the wants of the community . . . the institution will certainly fail of doing the work it ought, above all else, to do.<sup>2</sup>

This no doubt represents the opinion of the vanguard in the popular movement and, it should be remembered, of the more scholarly of the public librarians. For besides Fletcher, we find men such as Poole, Winsor, and Cutter supporting this attitude.<sup>3</sup> There were many librarians, however, who clung to

<sup>1</sup> *Public Libraries in the United States of America*, Special Report, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education (Washington, D.C. : Govt. Printing Office, 1876).

<sup>2</sup> W. I. Fletcher, "Public Libraries in Manufacturing Communities," *Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington, D.C. : Govt. Printing Office, 1876), XVII, 410.

<sup>3</sup> "Novel-Reading," (Conference Proceedings: Second Session), *Library Journal*, November 30th, 1876, pp. 96-101.

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the educational objectives by which the first advocates of free libraries had justified their proposals, and the expression of such convictions appears both in the government report and the contemporary professional journals. "Objective," however, is perhaps no longer the correct word, since the issue had in the meantime been narrowed down to "novels of the day" versus "works of instruction," without a clear definition of, or inquiry into, the nature of either. Consequently the controversy was inclined to develop into hasty expressions of personal opinion, and, as it became increasingly contentious, it became decreasingly significant as a contribution to library science.

The viewpoint of the upholders of an educational policy is thus represented in the 1876 report:

Physicians versed in the treatment of those nerve centers, whose disorder has so alarmingly increased of late years, have testified to the enervating influence of the prevalent romantic literature. . . . It has been hastily assumed that if our young people cannot obtain the sensational novels which they crave, they will make no use of the town library. But this is not so. Boys and girls will read what is put in their way, provided their attention is judiciously directed, and the author is not above their capacity.<sup>1</sup>

And the author goes on to refer to the reports of the Boston Public Library, which is frequently defined therein as "a supplement to the school system and an instrumentality of higher instruction to all classes of people." Professor Moses Coit Taylor in an address on January 16th, 1884, maintained a similar attitude,

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Quincy, "Free Libraries," *Public Libraries in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Govt. Printing Office, 1876), XVI, 393-4.

## AMERICAN LIBRARY DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY

in which he conceived the principal objective of the American public library as the promulgation of culture.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the social and moral reform motives which played such an important part in the beginnings of the British public library movement, were not absent from the American scene. The alleged superiority of the library to the bar-room as a social resort is re-echoed in this description of J. P. Quincy:

Even persons of local respectability, having nowhere else to go, were wont to stray in and stupify themselves into endurance of the vulgar jests of the barkeeper and the chorus of brutal talk that must prevail when whisky is abundant and women are left out. . . . Now, however, instead of the barkeeper and his satellites, we find modest and pleasing young women dispensing books over the counter. Here are workingmen, with their wives and daughters, reading in comfortable seats or selecting volumes to make home attractive.<sup>2</sup>

While this writer was gratified that the public library kept people out of the bars, W. F. Poole predicts that it will also help to keep them out of prisons and reformatories,<sup>3</sup> both attitudes being paralleled by those of the Englishmen Lawrence and Lubbock.<sup>4</sup> None the less, the hopes of Quincy and Poole in the efficacy of the public library to combat inebriety and crime, do not seem to have been materialized in the events of later years.

<sup>1</sup> M. C. Tyler, "The Historic Evolution of the Free Public Library in America," *Library Journal*, March 1884, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Quincy, *Public Libraries in the United States*, pp. 389-90.

<sup>3</sup> W. F. Poole, "The Organization and Management of Public Libraries," *op. cit.*, p. 477.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter III, p. 41.



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The twentieth century saw a change in meaning, or a shift in emphasis, from education to Americanization. The new crusade was necessitated by the increasing immigrant population, many of whom were not only unable to speak English, but were illiterate as well. It was therefore necessary for the library to ground such foreigners in the elements of civics and language, and librarians were justified in asking themselves such questions as these:

Must the poor foreigner go through a period of intellectual starvation until he has mastered enough English to furnish him with mental food? . . . Can we afford to let the foreigner remain uneducated?<sup>1</sup>

With these considerations in mind, the representatives of the library were among the first to greet the new arrivals, to whom the privileges and advantages of a free book service were outlined.

This, of course, was only one aspect of the work with the foreign-born, and one which has been among the most specific of public library objectives.

Less specific, though increasingly promulgated during the war, was that phase of Americanism which sought to inculcate patriotism into foreign and minority groups. This was considered a function of the public library as early as 1903, when Miss Countryman stated:

I believe still that the library should be an Americanizing institution. . . . Discontent with surroundings and ignorance are the causes of rebellion and disloyalty to one's country, and both of these the library may help to dispel from the foreigner.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Campbell, "Books in Foreign Languages," *The Library and its Contents* (New York: Wilson, 1925), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> G. Countryman, "Foreign Literature," *op. cit.*, p. 195.

## AMERICAN LIBRARY DURING NINETEENTH CENTURY

The declaration of war gave a new impetus to this particular kind of Americanism, for:

These are the days when we are all busy Americanizing each other. . . . The public library's usefulness will consist not only in Americanizing the foreigner but also in Americanizing Americans.<sup>1</sup>

In all such post-war claims and beliefs, in contrast to that Americanization policy which had sought to help recent immigrants, there is an uncertainty as to what the specific objectives of Americanism were. It is probable, of course, that many librarians did not subscribe to such a policy at all. However, as a definite statement of this social theory in so far as it affected public library policy during the war hysteria, we have taken the "Ten Points of Americanism" drawn up by Frank Crane and published presumably for the guidance of librarians in the *Library Journal*.<sup>2</sup> These "Ten Points" have been condensed and appended herewith in so far as they indicate a general social attitude which may have affected to some extent the public library policy during the war period, although how far such an attitude continues to affect that policy to-day it would be unwise and possibly unfair to say:

1. Teach American history—not too much detail. Emphasize biography, always more interesting than dates and theories.
2. Teach that in America are [*sic*] no classes.
3. Teach democracy, and how it is the only kind of government in the world under which the majority of the people can get what they want.

<sup>1</sup> J. Britton, "Library's Share in Americanization," *Library Journal*, October 1918, pp. 723 and 727.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Crane, "Ten Points of Americanism," *Library Journal*, March 1920, pp. 214-15.

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4. Teach the importance of education and of learning the English language.
5. Teach politics.
6. Teach law and order. . . . Here the door is open; and anyone who wants to break it down is a fool or a criminal or both.
7. Teach how to be a good sport.
8. Teach the right kind of patriotism, which in America only on rare occasions means going to war.
9. Teach that we have never wanted and never will want to conquer and rule the territory of any other people against their will; that America only desires to help other nations and trade with them to mutual advantage, and that it was for this purpose we went into the Great War.
10. Teach freedom.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF THE HISTORICAL FINDINGS

#### I. SOCIAL FORCES AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

THE objection is sometimes used as an indictment of the public library that it has become "largely independent of those very social forces which have brought it into being."<sup>1</sup> Shera in the article cited below maintains:

The new library movement gained in force through the increased polling strength of the people, a steady growth in *per capita* wealth and subsequent rise in standards of living, and was accelerated by the efforts of the labor movement, resulting in added leisure time from the eight- and ten-hour day.

Thus the library is seen not as an inert, static adjunct of our contemporary civilization; but rather as a dynamic, mobile phenomenon, responsive in every way to the vicissitudes that beset those economic forces which brought it into being.

Another writer of the same opinion is Arnold K. Borden, who suggests, among others, these "sociological beginnings"; the work and example of the federal government, increased voting strength of the people, and increase of leisure, the latter condition

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Shera, "Recent Social Trends and Future Library Policy," *Library Quarterly*, October 1933, p. 339.

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among the most populous classes of society "making the public library a necessity."<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding these suggestions, the historical evidence does not point to any such conclusions. If the data of the historical introduction and our interpretation of them are correct, it was not definite, articulated "social forces" which brought the public library into being so much as the efforts of progressive and philanthropic citizens who foresaw the need of such an institution before the people themselves did. For there is very little evidence proving a popular demand for libraries before the enactment of legislation authorizing their establishment; and even after the passing of an Act by the British Parliament and a Bill by the General Court of Massachusetts, it was in both cases a group of scholarly and influential citizens who planned, established, and directed the first public library. The chief motivating forces appear to have been reformative, philanthropic, and educational, all three being strengthened by the liberal policy so characteristic of the late nineteenth century.

Nor is it apparent that the other social and economic forces indicated by Borden and Shera were as instrumental in the development of the public library as it is often contended. "The voting strength of the people," for instance, is not apparent in the establishment of British public libraries: to the contrary, the electorate as a whole seemed comparatively indifferent. Greenwood in his chapter on "How to Bring about Adoption of the Acts" describes this indifference in the following unequivocal words:

<sup>1</sup> A. K. Borden, "Sociological Beginnings of the Library Movement," *Library Quarterly*, July 1931, pp. 278-82.

## SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Judging from the forty years' experience of the popular vote, it cannot be said to have been as successful as the best friends of the first Bill hoped would be the case. In many districts where the adoption has been carried, there has been an appalling amount of apathy and indifference, and the question has been ultimately carried by the few who have advocated the cause and those they have been enabled to gather around them. Frequently not one in ten of the ratepayers has voted where the method has been by voting papers, and in some cases where it has been settled by statutory meeting there has been an even worse evidence of the want of interest in the movement. In a country town in England, within the last year or two, a town's meeting numbering all told fifty souls carried the adoption of the Public Libraries Acts.<sup>1</sup>

A similar opinion is voiced by a belligerent opponent of free libraries; for according to M. D. O'Brien:

The Free Library, however, has not yet reached the same degree of compulsion as the Free School. A majority of the local public must vote for it before it can be established; or rather, we should say, there must be a majority favourable to it amongst *those who do take the trouble to record their votes*: usually a very small proportion of the electorate think it worth while to cross the street in order to pay a visit to the poll. When the Library is established, its real popularity is to be measured by the fact that its books are borrowed by only about one per cent. of the population. We make bold to say that if it ever becomes popular, it will be an extremely mischievous institution. As yet it is merely a plaything for a number of well-meaning busybodies, and an occasional convenience to a few middle-class readers.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. Greenwood, *Public Libraries*. 4th ed. (London: Cassell, 1894), pp. 77-8.

<sup>2</sup> M. D. O'Brien, "Free Libraries," T. Mackay (ed.), *A Plea for Liberty* (London: J. Murray, 1894), IX, 263.

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We may assume a still more passive and inarticulate attitude on the part of the unschooled working classes, at least until the turn of the century when the younger generation had received the advantage of an elementary education. Then, and not until then, do the popular aspects of the public library become evident. Greater educational opportunities and improved labour conditions may be postulated as social forces contributing to the growth of libraries, but so may the general national prosperity and local pride; and while we still have little evidence of the influence of the two former, the latter are accepted by contemporary observers as constant factors in the rapid expansion of the public library movement. In a handbill recommended by Greenwood for canvassing, and entitled, "Why Should Every Town Have a Public Library?" the following are five of the twenty reasons given:

Because the existence or absence of a Public Library in a town is being accepted as a standard of intelligence and public spirit manifested in that town.

Because all progressive towns have adopted the Public Libraries Acts and no town or village alive to the needs of to-day should be without one of these admirable institutions.

Because Public Library buildings always improve the adjoining property. Some tradesmen advertise their business as being within so many minutes' walk of the Public Library.

Because we do not want Old England to be behind other countries; and the United States, France, Germany, and the Australian Colonies have long ago accepted Public Libraries as absolute necessities.

Because it is said that the workmen of some other countries are better educated than ours, and Englishmen are determined that this shall not be so; and as one forward

## SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

step in this direction every town ought to have a Public Library.<sup>1</sup>

Fletcher reports that a sense of civic responsibility was likewise an influential factor in the formation of American libraries:

The first annual report of the commission contained a history of all the city and town libraries in the State, giving also illustrations of the library buildings. Towns having no libraries were cited in their alphabetical places alongside the others, with the simple statement, "This town has no public library." Great interest was excited throughout the State, and this unenviable prominence led many to eager acceptance of the liberal provisions of the new law.<sup>2</sup>

This competition often led to the erection of library buildings at the expense of some wealthy local benefactor.

There has been ready perception of the truth that one's memory cannot better be perpetuated than by an association with an institution so popular and at the same time so elevating and refining as the public library. Memorial libraries are therefore very abundant, and as expense has often not been spared in the erection of such memorials, many of our towns, even the smaller ones, are ornamented by library buildings which are gems of architecture.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. THE CONTRIBUTION OF CARNEGIE TO THE GROWTH OF LIBRARIES

We have seen there came into effect at the end of the nineteenth century a new and powerful agent in the development and destiny of libraries. This was the

<sup>1</sup> Greenwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 558-9.

<sup>2</sup> W. I. Fletcher, *Public Libraries in America* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.



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fortune of Andrew Carnegie. "In 1881, Mr. Carnegie began his great work of founding and aiding libraries."<sup>1</sup> In fact, so great were the wealth and munificence of this industrialist, that the history of the public library between 1880 and 1920 may almost be said to be the history of his endowments. The county of Ayr in Scotland, for example, up to 1890 evidently unresponsive to public libraries and the opportunities offered by the Act of 1850 and the subsequent legislation, was offered in the former year \$50,000 to organize a library system. The origin of the Ayr library movement cannot, under these circumstances, be regarded as the definite outcome of popular demand necessitated by improved labour conditions.

Carnegie's benefactions, which we now propose briefly to consider, are summed up by a writer on American library history:

Mr. Carnegie . . . since that time (1881) has given thirty millions of dollars for libraries in the United States, and fifteen millions to other parts of the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>2</sup>

It is noticeable that the peak period for both countries in the establishment of libraries is the period of the Carnegie grants. Reference to Fig. 1 shows that 225 libraries were established in England and Wales between the years 1897 and 1913. Meanwhile, in the whole of the British Isles, 295 libraries benefited "in sums varying from £400 to £120,000."<sup>3</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> S. S. Green, *Public Library Movement in the United States*, 1853-93 (Boston: The Boston Book Company, 1913), p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> C. K. Bolton, *American Library History* (Chicago: A. L. A. Publishing Board, 1919), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. S. Adams, *A Report on Library Provision and Policy to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees* (Edinburgh: Printed by Neill & Co., 1915), p. 11.

## SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

United States and Canada, \$43,665,000 were expended for public library buildings, the figures for 1923 showing that one-third, that is, 1,408 out of a total of 3,873 libraries in the United States, had a building erected at Carnegie's expense. In Canada, 115 out of a total of 202 libraries were similarly benefited, the figures and percentages for all these countries being tabulated in Table V.

The investigator must avoid, of course, a too literal interpretation of these figures, or generalizations concerning Carnegie's influence in one country on the basis of his library contributions to another. It is scarcely necessary to point out the divergence in the percentages between Ireland and the United States, although the reasons for this discrepancy are not so obvious. A consideration of the nature of the grant and the stipulations that accompanied it may be a part explanation not only of the high percentage of Carnegie libraries in Ireland but of the smallness of the total number of libraries.

TABLE V

### STATISTICS OF CARNEGIE GRANTS TO AMERICAN AND BRITISH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Year	Country	Grants	Total Libraries	Carnegie Libraries	Per Cent.
1913	England and Wales ...	£1,768,404	437	213	49
	Ireland ...	or	58	47	81
	Scotland ...	\$8,842,020	77	50	65
1923	United States	\$43,665,000	3,873	1,408	36
	Canada ...		202	115	57
Total	... ..	\$52,507,020	4,647	1,833	39

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The Endowment usually undertook to supply the building and sometimes the site, provided the authority was prepared to maintain a public library from the local rates, the general requirement being:

. . . that the community provide a site and bind itself to an annual maintenance charge of ten per cent. of the cost of the building.<sup>1</sup>

In Great Britain, and even more so in Ireland of this period, the result of a grant, if out of proportion with the annual yield of the library rate, limited by law to one penny in the pound, was often "nothing more nor less than an encumbrance," as one authority concluded, while another regrettable result was what Professor Adams calls "examples of overbuilding," of which the following is one:

Example E.—£15,000 in 1903 given by Mr. Carnegie. No money for books, rate only produced £80, could not afford proper librarian—only a caretaker, who gets 12s. a week, with house, coal, etc. Rate now produces £100, and about £10 is spent on books. Gift out of proportion to yield on rate.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious that the need and value of the Carnegie grants varied directly with the need and ability of the authorities to whom they were granted. Since it was impossible for the Endowment Fund to inquire adequately into each situation, there were bound to be instances of untimely or mistaken donations. The overbuilding and resultant financial disabilities of unwise authorities were some of the results, and these failures did not advance the welfare either of libraries or librarians. On the other hand, there were many

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Learned, *The American Public Library and the Diffusion of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1924), p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, *op. cit.*, Appendix IV.

## SUMMARY AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

instances in which it only needed an initial impetus, such as a building fund could give, to start a long-desired library movement and enlist the sympathy and aid of an hitherto somewhat apathetic public. The main thing was that such sympathy and aid should be sufficiently sincere to continue the initial impetus by cheerfully assuming the additional burden on the community. Where this was not done (as it frequently was not), it may have been due to indifference, to lack of public support, or to sheer inability on the part of the authorities. But in spite of all these considerations and factors, the Carnegie grants did enable the public library to assert its place in the social structure.

Beside the incentive of the Carnegie grants, there were other powerful agencies, not recognizable as popular or social forces, which contributed to the expansion of the public library movement. There were, for instance, the library associations and commissions who were able by means of promotion and grants to make both authorities and people library conscious, where hitherto they had been unaware of the urgency of such an institution.

## SUMMARY

The evidence which has been assembled in the historical examination of the public library suggests that the movement was not altogether the outcome of popular agitation nor of definite social demands, but was to a large extent the result of the efforts of progressive and public-spirited citizens, who were expressing the undefined and inarticulate needs of the people at large. To these efforts was given the powerful stimulus of private munificence. Contributing factors

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were governmental aid in the form of permissive legislation and of reports which publicized the complete lack of libraries in some instances and the deficiencies of existing libraries in others; the enthusiasm of local groups in matters of civic development; and the grants and donations of philanthropic corporations. Economic prosperity, of course, favoured the movement, but only in an indirect way. Incidentally, the use of the library increased in terms of gross circulation; but the causes for this are not clearly definable, though among them may be enumerated urbanization, unemployment, and popularization of the library's book stock. Improved labour conditions, if accompanied by corresponding improved wage conditions, are not necessarily an index of greater library use. It may be that the working classes under good conditions use their leisure in other ways than reading—especially if the converse is true: that economic depression and enforced idleness result in a greater use of the library.

All these considerations lead us to conclude that the public library is not simply a popular institution either in origin or development. Moreover, its social implications and objectives are likewise uncertain, largely because of this. However, instead of ignoring the problems by allowing the library to develop in the future as it has done in the past "as an isolated social phenomenon," librarians must identify this institution with specific social aims. What these aims are and how they relate to a theory of book selection is the theme of the second part of this study.

PART II

THE THEORY OF BOOK SELECTION

THE CONTRIBUTION OF RELATED FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE



## CHAPTER VI

THE HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT  
AS THE BASIS FOR A SOCIAL THEORY OF BOOK  
SELECTION

WHEN we review the foregoing historical synopsis, it is evident that there were four main trends in the public library movement, although the question of their priority cannot be categorically stated or generalized for both countries. In the case of the reformative and educational trends both were evident in varying degrees at the same time, the former predominating in England perhaps and the latter in America at the beginning of the movement. Taking them singly, however, the first trend, or perhaps impetus would be a more exact term, was the reformative one, in which the library was evidently intended to be a medium of social amelioration. Next followed a period of educational interest, during which the library was regarded by some as "an annex to the public schools" and "the working man's university."<sup>1</sup> This theory in its turn was gradually supplanted in some quarters by the conviction that the people must first be permitted to read the books they manifestly liked before they could be persuaded to embark upon literature "tending to

<sup>1</sup> M. C. Tyler, "The Free Public Library in America," *Library Journal*, March 1884, p. 45.



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moral and intellectual improvement”<sup>1</sup>; and so the emphasis shifted to the recreational value of reading, until the extreme democratic position was finally reached: that since the public library was a tax-supported institution, the people were entitled to have what they wanted to read, whether recreational or otherwise, instead of what any authority asserted they ought to read. This opinion was more or less current before the end of the nineteenth century, judging by statements such as this:

In the first place, we try to provide the books people want—not those we think they ought to read.<sup>2</sup>

Now inasmuch as these theories were not independent of each other, but all four interacted in varying degrees on public library policy, confusion sometimes arose as to which of them represented the primary social objective of the public library. The confusion is also apparent in the general attitude towards book selection wherever it is considered necessary to pay respects to all four theories, even though the librarian must eventually prefer one or the other of the four as the principal determinant of his policy. In support of this assertion, we would cite the President's addresses at the annual conferences of both the American and British Library Associations, or the literature of public library book selection itself.

The issue before the book selector becomes less complicated only according as he defines the essential aim of a library. We see in the case of learned, special,

<sup>1</sup> *Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor* (Boston: J. R. Osgood & Co., 1876), II, 318.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Crunden, “Selection of Books,” *Library Journal*, December 1894, p. 41.

THE HISTORY OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY MOVEMENT  
and even subscription libraries how book selection becomes clarified by the use of a single standard.

Book selection for an engineering library is relatively straightforward and simple, since it integrates exactly with the purpose of such a library, which is to supply the clientele with the most authoritative works in their field. There is no problem here of differentiating between educational and recreational values, of trying to clarify the social issue, or of justifying the choice by majority approval.

While it is not easy to formulate a definition, there is no vagueness when it comes to the purpose of all special libraries, and it is in this purpose that they are united in their organization.<sup>1</sup>

The author goes on to define that purpose as the solution of particular problems; the presenting (but not necessarily the preservation) of relevant material; the utilization of the individual expert's knowledge and the results of special field work; the collection and sifting of all available material for the specialist, etc.

The singleness of purpose and function which is so characteristic of the special library, is not so evident in either the history or the present organization of the public library. The aim, function, and achievement of the special library are based on a definite knowledge of the clientele to be served and the principle of utility. By a simple combination of such knowledge and such a principle, a special library's value and efficiency are limited only by material considerations of book budgets, extent of shelving, and the like.

In contrast to the simple structure of the special

<sup>1</sup> R. H. Johnston, "Special Libraries—A Report of Fifty Representative Libraries," *Library Journal*, April 1914, pp. 280-4.

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library (and one may include all libraries with a specialized function, whether learned or popular), stands the public library which has, partly as a result of its history, a bewilderingly complicated social purpose, with much less unanimity, it would seem, than the public school movement.<sup>1</sup> Public librarians, too, more markedly than public educators, have been at variance as to the fundamental nature of their institutions. This is evident from the historical analysis, and it is also likely that the divergence of views increased with the growth of the public library movement. In the earliest days in England, for instance, the reformatory objective of the public library was unified and strong enough to overcome the opposition, the conservatism, and the apathy with which the movement was variously confronted.<sup>2</sup> Once, however, the urgency of reform diminished in England (though not necessarily because of the influence of the public library), and once the emphasis was shifted from education to recreation in America, the institution lost much of its social force.

It might seem at first glance that the purpose of these remarks was to argue for the simplification of the public library's function in terms of a particular social objective instead of accepting the confusion inevitably caused in public library policy by the interaction of several conflicting objectives. This, indeed, is an easy solution if we declare unconditionally for a wholly

<sup>1</sup> F. P. Graves, "Rise of the Common School in America," *A History of Education in Modern Times* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), IV, 78-119.

See also E. P. Cubberley, "The Battle for Free State Schools," *Public Education in the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919), V, 118-52.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Part I, Chapter III.

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educational or a recreational objective. But the issue cannot be simplified to that extent, inasmuch as the public library is itself no longer a simplex organization designed to fulfil a single social need. It has now to recognize its obligations to all of the aims it has, at various stages of its history, attempted to recognize singly. It has, that is, obligations to social progress, to education, to recreation, and to its democratic structure; or, more concretely, it must be simultaneously reformative, educational, recreational, and democratic in its activities.

Of these four objectives, two, the educational and recreational, seem to be fundamental, and two, the reformative and democratic, incidental. This may be illustrated in the case of reform by pointing out that libraries in England and America are no longer direct rivals to the public-house or saloon, as they were often intended to be throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> They can, however, and must *incidentally* enlist their forces on the side of truth and social justice, even while avoiding the assumption underlying the reformative objective of the first libraries, that it was better for people to read anything not positively harmful than for them not to read at all.

So with the democratic principle, which as a primary objective was liable to result in such policies as the Americanization and the popularization of the public library. The former, the enlistment of the public library in the cause of nationalism, cannot superficially be reconciled with ideals of social equity, nor with the needs of groups not subscribing to such a political philosophy. Yet the library is bound by its constitution to recognize the legitimate claims of even the smallest

<sup>1</sup> See Part I, Chapters II and IV.

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of minority groups if it is to be a public institution and not a political machine.

The second logical outcome of an unconditionally democratic principle may be a dictatorship of the majority and the acceptance of inferior standards as criteria of book selection. No public library, of course, has attempted to carry this principle to its logical conclusion by stocking its shelves with mass or tabloid publications and excluding any book which did not appeal to the majority. In keeping with the tenets of democracy, a compromise was reached, the demand of the majority being recognized to the extent that they were conformable with an inarticulated conception of the social good. This, however, is not altogether a satisfactory arrangement.

The educational objective was the first in point of time in the development of the American public library, and there have always been proponents in both the American and British movements of the subordination of the public library to the public school. This trend reappeared in the English system in the governmental approval of the local Education Committee as the library authority in the case of county libraries.<sup>1</sup> In America, the theory has become identified with a somewhat indeterminate adult education movement, but the results on the public library book selection policy of either country have not yet been clearly defined.

We may pause here to note the confusion of thought which has resulted from the uncertainty and indefiniteness of the educational function of the library. This

<sup>1</sup> J. H. Wellard, "Introduction to a Comparative Study of American and English Library Law," *Library Association Record*, December 1934, p. 453.

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confusion may have arisen from mistaking the function of the mid-nineteenth century school libraries and mechanics' institutes in England with that of the public library at the time of its emergence. The school and mechanics' libraries were formal educational or cultural agencies, the former being subordinated to the school itself and the latter to the adult education movement promoted by Shaftesbury and Brougham among the English artisans.<sup>1</sup> The books in these libraries, then, were formal text books, manuals, classics, and the general reading material on which the curriculum was based. But the popular libraries instituted around 1850 were not intended for formal students and could not, therefore, be regarded as a complement of the schools, although there was a prolonged attempt to regard them as such. Unfortunately, the popular conception of education was limited to a period of formal training in specific institutions, but stopping short at the precincts of the institutions themselves.

And so, when it was found that the library could not be subordinate to one or the other of the centres of learning, its educational function becoming more uncertain and vague, the emphasis gradually shifted to the recreational function. The library's obligations to the initial educational objective, however, have always been admitted in the inclusion of a considerable proportion of informative books. Hence even the

<sup>1</sup> Brougham and Vaux, Henry Peter Brougham, 1st baron, *Practical Observations upon the Education of the People* (Manchester. Printed by A. Prentice, 1825); and Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, 7th earl of, *Speeches . . . upon Subjects Having Relation Chiefly to the Claims and Interests of The Labouring Class* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1868).

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smallest public libraries try to include the ancient and modern classics of literature and the rudiments of scientific book-learning, or as one writer on book selection sums it up, "standard works which have stood the test of time."<sup>1</sup>

When it was discovered, as it very quickly was, that the public library clientele was not a group of primary or secondary school students and that the "standard works" were not particularly sought after, the protests of readers, the deficiencies in circulation, and the alarm of library authorities were met by a compromise with popular taste and the inclusion of more entertaining books. At first, the surrender was only partial, as the nineteenth-century fiction controversy implies, all fiction being ruled out but other forms of imaginative literature admitted.<sup>2</sup> Soon, however, the text-book novelists were included, then the popular (but none the less reputable) contemporary writers such as Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Henry Wood, and even the prolific Miss Braddon. To-day, the selection of contemporary fiction is less rigorous, some libraries having surrendered almost completely to the demand for sensational fiction.

As long as education is conventionally regarded as a formal preparation in some field or fields of knowledge, the public library cannot be regarded as an educational institution. It is not fitted by function to make such formal preparation, because it was not, and is not, intended for formal students alone. The confusion

<sup>1</sup> R. Johnson, "General Policy of Book Selection," *Library World*, July 1915, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See "Novel-Reading." Conference of Librarians at Philadelphia. Proceedings reported in the *Library Journal*, November 1876, pp. 96-100.

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seems to have arisen from the coincidence that a great part of institutional education is dispensed by means of books, and it was consequently assumed that the library could dispense education with its books, whereas all it could provide was the information on which the formal educative process is based. Once the full significance of this fact is recognized—that the library is a centre of reference and information for all groups in the community—its aims and resources in this respect will be definitely regarded as utilitarian, and the formal educational issue will be left to take care of itself.

But even if a redefinition of one of the library's objectives as utilitarian clarifies one particular issue, the apparent incompatibility with the recreational function remains, and, indeed, may seem even greater. First of all, reading for recreation would doubtlessly include the whole range of literature, both imaginative and scientific. One man may read Kant for amusement, another Edgar Rice Burroughs, and the same man both writers, so that if the library is to select books simply on the principle that one ratepayer had as much right to have his reading preferences satisfied as another, there will be no standard by which to judge the relative merits of two books so widely diverse as the *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. If recourse is made to the democratic principle of majority preference, the latter will have to be selected; yet there will linger in the mind of the librarian who has followed such a principle to its logical conclusion certain doubts as to the advisability of his choice.

It is not difficult to identify the source of these doubts: they will certainly arise from a realization of the library's loftier obligations to society. These obligations can by no stretch of the democratic principle



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be confounded with the function of those popular institutions dependent upon the exploitation of vulgar taste. Conversely, the public library must observe, to a greater or lesser extent, standards of taste dictated not by the majority but based on certain æsthetic canons. What those canons are, it is not yet time to discuss, but that need not prevent us from asserting the public library's obligation to recognize them.

What this amounts to, then, is the redefinition of recreation in terms of social, ethical, and literary qualities. In other words, the right to recreation through books provided by a rate-supported public library is fully recognized, but it is not an individualistic right nor a vulgar form of recreation. The right is a collective one, and must therefore be measured in terms of social not private advantage; and the recreation, if it is to be beneficial, must be referred to some accepted standards of æsthetic taste. All of these conclusions point to the humanist principle, which recognizes only that recreation as good which entails the healthy and intelligent exercise of the faculties. And so it is with reading.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen that this cultural limitation of recreation does not preclude the selection of even the most banal fiction if it can be shown that such reading excites the desirable qualities in any particular reader or reading group. It is not impossible to conceive of a situation in which the cheapest "thriller" would meet the requisites of healthfulness and intelligence. But from generalized observations it is evident that the

<sup>1</sup> The concepts of the two principles of utility and humanism are taken from E. A. Baker, "Book Selection: Fundamental Principles and Some Applications," *Library Association Record*, January 1911, pp. 17-29.

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indiscriminate supply of such books in public libraries represents a failure either to recognize or to observe better standards of taste, and in the light of the humanist principle such a policy must be condemned as unsocial, even if it can be defended as democratic. As far as the argument based on circulation figures is concerned, the only observation necessary is that humanism does not admit the superiority of quantity to quality; but, to the contrary, prefers the latter to the former; or, in terms of public library policy, prizes a single good book read by a few readers to many inferior ones read by many readers.<sup>1</sup>

It will be apparent at this point that a further discussion of the principles of utility and humanism as social objectives for the public library must be linked up with the more practical bases of book selection. For certain fundamental considerations which bridge the gap between the theory and the practice of book selection have been touched upon, and it is now fitting to develop them further. We have spoken, for instance, of social, ethical, and æsthetic standards, or implied them in the use of such terms as "good." We have also referred frequently to the actual readers, either as individuals or as groups, and they must be considered from still another angle. But since the ramifications of our subject are so diverse, extending in the last analysis to the limits of life and science, we must for the sake of precision define the limits within which it is practical to work. Those limits, then, are the logical ones

<sup>1</sup> For a study of humanism in its relation to literature, see N. Foerster, *Towards Standards* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1930), and in its relation to philosophy, Haldane, Richard Burdon Haldane, 1st Viscount, *The Philosophy of Humanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press).

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imposed by a tripartite conception of the field of book selection as bounded on one side by the book, on the second by the reader, and on the third by the public library as the place of distribution.

In the following pages it is intended to consider each of them in the given order, and to consider them independently in an attempt to indicate the bases on which a theory of book selection should rest, remembering that the social philosophy favoured in our approach to the problem is that prescribed by the two principles of utility and humanism.

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Any comprehensive analysis of the book must take into account four main divisions under the headings of authorship, content, style, and publication. This analysis, it will be observed at once, ignores those aspects of the book which are concerned with the reader and the source, although it is almost impossible to discuss one without reference to the other two.

None the less, certain departments of knowledge primarily concerned with particular phases of the book do consider them independently of the others, as this specialized procedure is so much more convenient. Literary history, literary criticism, book reviewing, biography, and bibliography are the major disciplines concerned with the book itself or with some aspect of it, and consequently disregard the complex factor of reading. The literary historian in his rôle of judicial critic is no doubt justified in describing a world of books rather than of readers, an approach which also holds good for the literary critic proper.

According to Matthew Arnold:

Real criticism . . . obeys an instinct . . . to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespective of practice, politics, and everything of the kind, and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best

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(without the intrusion of any other consideration whatever).<sup>1</sup>

Arnold's is the idealistic attitude—"to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and application," and to adopt this attitude the commentator must assume a species of reader whose reading interests, needs, and abilities do not affect the intrinsic nature of the book. This is the consciously artificial basis underlying literary history and criticism, and one which is essential to the judicial approach to literature and to the criticism which refers its judgments to historical models accepted as good by universal agreement. Such a school of thought is typified by the critical theory of the neo-classicists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

But while granting the need for a judicial or inductive school of literary criticism, one must admit that books after all are written for and read by actual, not hypothetical readers, so that a knowledge of such should enter into our estimate of the books themselves. Indeed, it seems a serious deficiency in the field of literature that while there are innumerable histories of books, there is no record of their readers. Where facts or implications of actual readers are available, it is not difficult to comprehend their important bearing on an author and his work. Our knowledge, for instance, of an Elizabethan audience goes a long way towards explaining the evolution and the structure of the late sixteenth-century drama. Without that knowledge any evaluation of Marlowe, Shakespeare, or Jonson

<sup>1</sup> M. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), pp. 15-16.

<sup>2</sup> G. Saintsbury, "Modern Criticism," Book VII, *History of Criticism* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1906), III, pp. 3-182.

LITERARY BASES FOR A THEORY OF BOOK SELECTION would be defective and probably misleading.<sup>1</sup> And this particular example illustrates the general truth, that literature is profoundly affected by the type of public it is intended for: and since this is so, both historian and critic should take the readers themselves into account in their judgment upon the ultimate value of a book.

Even more should the librarian take them into account, since he is concerned with literary criticism principally in its analysis of trends in human thought and expression. He is hardly concerned at all with the higher criticism of Matthew Arnold, except in so far as he is a student of ideas. As a book selector, he will turn more directly to the book review, which we take to be concerned solely with current literature and which has, therefore, the strictly practical object of evaluating books for actual readers. As Professor Brander Matthews says:

Literary criticism is concerned with the fixed stars of the past and book reviewing with the visitors of the present day.<sup>2</sup>

Some consideration of the actual readers is observed in a roughly empirical fashion in so far as specialists are commissioned to review non-fiction books in their particular field with a view to the needs of specialized groups. And even in literature proper, attention is sometimes given by the reviewer to the readers for whom the book is intended, although generally more by implication than by direct statement.

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Jusserand, *A Literary History of the English People: The Age of Elizabeth* (New York: Putnam's, 1926), V, pp. 36-105.

<sup>2</sup> B. Matthews, "The Whole Duty of a Book Reviewer," *New York Times Book Review*, July 23rd, 1922, p. 2.

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While we have wished to indicate the relation of the reader to the book (and that of such material factors as accessibility, advertising, and format should also be taken into account in a comprehensive estimate), we would not wish to deny either the reasonableness of considering books independently of the reader or the necessity of standards of taste even in a discussion of practical book selection. For it is indisputable that there are æsthetic and literary canons which represent a common heritage and not a personal prejudice, and these canons together with the theories from which they have evolved concern the librarian as book selector.

Before proceeding to consider those disciplines which relate to the book, we can limit the field to be surveyed to that division of our analysis which primarily concerns æsthetic and literary qualities. Obviously authorship with its particular questions involving the writer's qualifications, his specialization, his impartiality, and his reputation do not fall within the province of taste. They belong rather to the field of biography and special departments of scholarship. Similarly content, by which is implied the scope of the book, treatment, degree of accuracy, arrangement of material, historical importance, and recency is largely a matter of critical bibliography whose tools are the traditional aids to book selection.<sup>1</sup> And so with publication and its related questions of format and distribution, upon which it is unnecessary to dilate in a discussion addressed to librarians. This leaves us that division of the book concerned with style and literary form,

<sup>1</sup> Any discussion or text-book of book selection will list, with varying degrees of completeness, these indispensable tools of librarianship. See, for instance, H. B. Van Hoesen and F. K. Walter, *Bibliography, Practical, Enumerative, Historical* (New York : Scribner's, 1928).

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which are the characteristics distinguishing imaginative from informative literature, and which are the special province of literary criticism.

It is not practical to discuss literary criticism as a theory of taste or in its historical development or according to schools of thought, although all of these are relevant to book selection in some phase or other.<sup>1</sup> But remembering the humanist principle of healthful and intelligent recreation, it is necessary to indicate the assistance that literary criticism can offer the fulfilment of this social objective.

Now inasmuch as literary criticism is concerned primarily with standards of quality, it must be the basis of book selection in all departments of imaginative literature; moreover, in that the inquiry seeks to postulate general laws underlying the infinite variations of æsthetic phenomena, it may be regarded as a science, although an imperfect one.<sup>2</sup> It is sometimes objected, of course, that there is no ultimate appeal from individual taste, and this is taken by some as an additional argument in support of the democratic in contrast to the humanist principle, and once again invokes the issue of a "low-brow" majority versus a refined minority. The book selector in deciding such issues should be aware of the social and philosophical implications, for the delusively simple solution that a hundred readers of Edgar Wallace are to be preferred to ten of George Moore does not explain away the factors of literary quality and social obligation.

<sup>1</sup> C. M. Cayley and F. N. Scott, *Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism: the Bases in Æsthetics and Poetics* (Boston : Ginn & Co., 1900).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. Hennequin, *La Critique Scientifique*. 2nd ed. (Paris : Perrin et Cie., 1888).



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A second consideration and a more serious objection against a theory of taste is the divergence of opinion among literary critics themselves, a consideration which complicates the book selector's task considerably, and often drives him back upon his own empirical standards. This diversity and the resultant complexity are summed up by I. A. Richards in this conclusion:

The more thoroughly we work out our own account of the differences between good and bad, the more intricate and complex the account becomes.<sup>1</sup>

The variations of taste are not by any means confined to the contemporary belles-lettres of a particular country, but may involve national taste. Thus, the literature preferred in a foreign country often shows a striking divergence from that considered either good or popular in the place of origin. This is illustrated by Tolstoi's criticism and misrepresentation of Shakespeare, in which he heavily censures the dramatist for defects such as anachronisms, arbitrary action, unnatural language, plagiarism, and lack of proportion.<sup>2</sup>

Hence the librarian, unless he takes the line of least resistance in his selection of that literature, will justify his choice in terms more weighty than individual reaction or popular approval. And in spite of that variation in taste which appears to negate a science of criticism based on abiding principles, we may remember that the good has been separated from the trivial, and the permanent from the ephemeral in the literature of the past; and inasmuch as what was considered poetry

<sup>1</sup> I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> L. Tolstoi, "Shakespeare"; in H. S. Mallory (ed.), *Backgrounds of Book Reviewing* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr, 1923), pp. 90-100.

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in Homer's day continues to be admired for similar æsthetic qualities to-day, it is evident that there must be some permanent and universal principles of taste.<sup>1</sup> If the librarian admits of these principles in his selection of the classics, is he or is he not guilty of an inconsistency should he repudiate them in his judgment of contemporary literature?

Another difficulty which confronts the literary critic is the range of admittedly literary effects, which, like the range of subject-matter, is as wide as human experience itself. It is sometimes argued, of course, that there are inherently unartistic effects and subjects. The validity of this poetic theory, it will be remembered, was challenged by Wordsworth in his preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*:

It is supposed that by the art of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he will not only thus apprise the reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded.<sup>2</sup>

and this convention he notably defied in his choice of "incidents and situations from common life." Breakfast plates, basement kitchens, housemaids, roofs, and the like are presumably among the ideas and expressions to "be carefully excluded," but T. S. Eliot in his poem, "Morning at the Window,"<sup>3</sup> uses all of these objects to obtain an effect which is adjudged by

<sup>1</sup> C. T. Winchester, *Some Principles of Literary Criticism* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> H. J. George (ed.), *Wordsworth's Prefaces and Essays on Poetry* (Boston: Heath, 1892), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Morning at the Window" in M. Van Doren, *Anthology of World Poetry* (New York: Boni, 1929), p. 1272.

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the consensus of competent critics to be poetic. It would seem, then, that what at first glance may be regarded as an obstacle to critical evaluation really simplifies the process, since criticism is not prescribed by conventional effects and subjects; to the contrary, whatever exists in the consciousness of man is legitimate material for the artist. It is the critic's function to point out whatever is of æsthetic value in each individual specimen of literature, and the librarian's to select them accordingly. Moreover, the latter has an additional criterion which is for the most part denied the critic: the criterion of interest. For it is certain that the incidental value of a book will be decided according to its degree of interest as well as of its artistic excellence. In this respect, however, both critic and book selector must avoid references to greater or less *intrinsic* value, unless they disregard subject-matter altogether and confine their evaluation to form and technique.

Before discussing, however, the nature of interest and those aspects of the book which we have hitherto somewhat artificially excluded from our discussion, we should first summarize the foregoing analysis.

First, it must not be supposed that any critical principles can ever give the librarian a short and easy method for judging literary quality; nor indeed are rules and precepts the first essentials in the equipment of the book selector. They presuppose a knowledge of certain normative sciences, of rhetoric, poetics, æsthetics, and, above all, of literature itself. To this knowledge must be conjoined a certain sensitiveness, a sympathy or an accord with the requirements of readers themselves.

It is evident, however, that the librarian is not a

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critic evaluating literature, but a selector of books for actual readers, hence it is inadvisable to stay too long in the rarefied atmosphere of æsthetics. But before turning to the increasingly urgent demands of the actual reader, we may emphasize the value of a critical theory to the librarian as an arbiter of taste. He cannot, therefore, afford to ignore the particular bases which we have referred to in this chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BASES

Book selection, unlike literary criticism, is concerned as much with the reader as with the book. If it were not, a public library would be full of highly commendable books from the literary standpoint, but books suited to only a bare minority of readers, a situation which would be no more justifiable than the subjection of standards of taste to vulgar preference. The great problem—it is not a dilemma—of the book selector is to observe a balance between the utilitarian principle as it is expressed by the actual reading needs, interests, and abilities of the whole library clientele and between the humanist principle based on literary standards.

Before we can reasonably consider this fundamental problem, we ought to know something about readers and reading as well as about books and their composition. This may seem abundantly self-evident, yet if the province of book selection is identified with that of literary criticism, the *intrinsic* value of the book is likely to be emphasized to the neglect of the actual needs of the reader. The actual needs of the reader in terms of the book will be its *incidental* or *relative* value, which may be quite independent of any intrinsic or absolute qualities. This is the attitude of some students of reading psychology, notably of Nicolai

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Roubakine,<sup>1</sup> who ignores intrinsic values and emphasizes the personal reactions of the reader. Hence, Roubakine concludes, it is the librarian's function to determine the psychological types of reader rather than to select "good" books on a wholly literary basis. A somewhat similar idea is expressed differently by Richards in his definition of a poem (and the same observation would hold good of a book) as:

A mental prism, capable of separating . . . readers into a number of distinguishable types,

for poems have

. . . a high refractive index, and perform the analytical function to perfection.<sup>2</sup>

We can see that this "refractive index" or incidental value of the book is of great importance to the book selector, provided he can define it in terms of actual needs; otherwise, he is merely guessing at values, or substituting a policy which is often neither utilitarian nor humanistic. Therefore, to avoid a purely empirical method, it is essential for the book selector to identify his readers and to avoid both the literary critic's conception of a "standard" reader on the one hand, and the "generic" species of library statistics on the other. He will need, in other words, to classify readers by homogeneous and identifiable groups, and for this purpose will utilize social traits which have been found the most trustworthy bases for the description of reading as a social activity.

<sup>1</sup> N. Roubakine, *Introduction à la Psychologie Bibliologique* (Paris : J. Povolozky et Cie., 1922).

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York : Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p. 53.

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This method has been developed notably by Hofmann,<sup>1</sup> Gray,<sup>2</sup> and Waples,<sup>3</sup> the latter of whom defines the term "group":

. . . to mean a number of persons of similar sex, of similar amount of schooling, and of similar social, economic, or occupational status. A group thus defined has reading interests sufficiently in common so that the ratings of a list of topics by one individual in the group is positively correlated with the ratings made by any other individual in the group. From this point of view, any individual may be considered in several groups, and it is unnecessary to draw any hard-and-fast distinction between them. If a librarian is considering the reading interests of library patrons, he will probably divide the patronage into several groups and determine the interests of each group in turn. The only principle to be kept in mind in forming a group is to have its composition relatively homogeneous with respect to the factors which have been separately discussed—especially sex, schooling, and social, economic, or occupational status.<sup>4</sup>

The conventional book classification used in library circulation statistics, when carried over into a reader classification, tends to limit the data to the number of readers reading certain broad classes of books, and does not indicate who reads them. If the process is refined to include the persons reading particular books,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W. Hofmann, *Die Lektüre der Frau* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931), pp. 9-14.

<sup>2</sup> W. S. Gray and R. Munroe, *The Reading Interests and Habits of Adults* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 103 ff.

<sup>3</sup> D. Waples and R. Tyler, *What People Want to Read About* (Chicago: American Library Association and the University of Chicago Press, 1931).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-3.

<sup>5</sup> See C. H. Compton, *Who Reads What?* (New York: Wilson, 1934).

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undue and misleading emphasis may be placed on specified individuals. The emphasis is misleading because it points to erroneous generalizations. The fact that six automobile mechanics have borrowed novels by Thomas Hardy over a certain period of time, signifies nothing concerning automobile mechanics in general, although the isolation of selected data can support almost any interpretations the commentator likes.

To avoid false conclusion, the book selector intent on discovering the actual reading of his clientele will base his observations on data of a more general and comprehensive kind. He can, for instance, adopt the procedure common to sociology, of working with homogeneous groups, and determine statistically to what extent the individual members of such groups conform to a common pattern of behaviour. So he naturally finds that reading behaviour does conform to a group pattern, and is itself a factor of homogeneity. Several investigators have already applied sociological methods to the study of reading.<sup>1</sup>

The data requisite for the book selector, however, are not confined to what people actually do read, even if such knowledge does go far towards predicting their needs under certain conditions. But there are related problems of why people read what they do, not to mention the corollary of what they would read if they could. These questions impinge upon sciences other than sociology and notably upon psychology. Nor

<sup>1</sup> Waples, *op. cit.*; Hofmann, *op. cit.*, and D. Waples, "Community Studies in Reading; I. Reading in the Lower East Side," *Library Quarterly*, January 1933, pp. 1-20; also L. Carnovsky, "Community Studies in Reading; II. Hinsdale, A Suburb of Chicago," *Library Quarterly*, January 1935, pp. 1-30.



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must we overlook the economic factors which may account for some aspects of reading behaviour; political conditions which directly affect others; and more indirect considerations such as the historical and geographical which might contribute to our understanding of many more.<sup>1</sup>

Under the purely psychological factors, it is not difficult to recognize individual motive, which may be strong enough to depart from customary social, economic, political; or other considerations characteristic of groups, and to overcome various obstacles to the attainment of a reading desire; or which, again, may be scarcely apparent at all in the choice of "something to read." Without serious attention to individual and group motives which indicate trustworthy distinctions among groups and relate to distinguishable kinds of literature, the book selector is bound to work in the dark. He is unable to recognize such considerations in his evaluation of readers' needs and of classes of reading material.

Likewise falling within the province of psychology are those factors pertaining to reading ability and reading difficulties, upon which considerable spadework has been done.<sup>2</sup> Subject interest also belongs here; first, with its problem of the relation of interest

<sup>1</sup> See W. S. Gray, *Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), and Supplements Nos. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, E. L. Thorndike, *The Teacher's Word Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927); E. L. Thorndike, "The Vocabularies of Juvenile Books," *Library Quarterly*, April 1935, pp. 151-63; E. Dale and R. W. Tyler, "Factors Influencing the Difficulty of Reading," *Library Quarterly*, July 1935, pp. 384-412; and W. S. Gray and B. E. Leary, *What Makes a Book Readable?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935).

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to actual reading<sup>1</sup>; and, secondly, with the problem of ascertaining the causes of interest. All contribute to the main issue of the influence of reading on the behaviour and attitudes of the individual and of the group.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the more obvious and explored contributions of such sciences as sociology and psychology to an understanding of the reader, we mentioned other disciplines like economics, political science, history, and geography, which may also be consulted in the interpretation of certain reading phenomena; and, conversely, the study of reading has much to contribute to, as well as to receive from, these fields of knowledge.

To illustrate these bare references to contingent sciences, we may intimate how significant are current economic trends not only in the choice, but also in the distribution, of reading matter. It is, for instance, abundantly evident that many readers can neither afford to purchase, nor publishing houses to put out, certain kinds of journals and books in times of economic depression, and it is a regrettable consequence of these subnormal conditions that publications continue to flourish or to cease chiefly according to their financial success or lack of it.<sup>3</sup> This introduces a strictly material criterion into the commercial distribution and selection

<sup>1</sup> D. Waples, "The Relation of Subject Interests to Actual Reading," *Library Quarterly*, January 1932, pp. 42-70; and L. Carnovsky, "A Study of the Relationship between Reading Interest and Actual Reading," *Library Quarterly*, January 1935, pp. 76-110.

<sup>2</sup> For work done in this field of educational psychology, see the Payne Fund Studies, R. Peterson, and L. Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).

<sup>3</sup> O. H. Cheyney, *Economic Survey of the Book Industry, 1930-1931* (New York: National Association of Book Publishers, 1931).

## BOOK SELECTION

of reading matter, and one which the librarian must take into account. For he must decide (as the book-stalls and rental libraries have already decided) whether his book selection policy is to be determined in part or in full by such material considerations.

Not so obvious as this direct and measurable effect on the publication and distribution of literature are the psychological implications of such economic trends. Such trends are bound to affect not only actual reading, but reading tastes and predilections, in the same way as they affect other forms of behaviour. This fact is amply illustrated by those studies of the effects of the depression on the reading of working and workless groups.<sup>1</sup> Such studies, however incomplete, certainly indicate a vast field for research into those kinds of literature which are encouraged and those which are discouraged by depression and unemployment.<sup>2</sup> It is more than probable that these economic factors have called into being a huge body of "crisis" literature, just as they are responsible for the mass of "escape" novels by whose aid the rental libraries now flourish. In studying these economic trends, therefore, the librarian will be face to face with certain fundamental considerations bearing directly on his book selection

<sup>1</sup> For a description of the effects of unemployment on psychology and reading preference, see the publications of the Oesterreichische Wirtschaftspsychologische Forschungstelle under the direction of Dr. Paul Lazarsfeld. A popular account of Dr. Lazarsfeld's study of the village of Marienthal will be found in R. N. McMurtry, "When Men Eat Dogs," *The Nation*, January 4, 1933, pp. 15-18.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Professor Douglas Waples' report of his European survey given before the Adult Education Round Table at the American Library Association Fifty-fourth Annual Conference. See the *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, August 1932, pp. 504-6.

policy, and he certainly cannot afford to ignore them.<sup>1</sup>

These references to the relation of economic factors and trends to the study of reading apply in a comparable manner to political considerations. Political issues and conditions will influence reading in definite ways, which the political scientist is best equipped to study.<sup>2</sup> Some of the effects are more apparent than others. The number and success of party libraries and literature, notably in those countries where freedom of expression is threatened or denied altogether, are evidences of the effect of recent political trends on libraries and reading.<sup>3</sup>

Another result will be the less self-evident, psychological manifestation which was noted in connection with economic depression; that is, the workless and socially dissatisfied will look towards certain political parties for the betterment of their condition, and their attitudes will be expressed in their patronage of certain libraries and their preference for certain kinds of reading. Alternatively, the party in power may attempt some form of censorship in varying degrees of rigour, in the hopes that the reading public will become conditioned to their propaganda literature because none other is available. These considerations must profoundly affect public library book selection, and have,

<sup>1</sup> D. Waples, L. Carnovsky, and W. M. Randall, "The Public Library in the Depression," *Library Quarterly*, October 1932, pp. 321-43; and R. D. H. Smith, "English Libraries in the Depression," *Library Association Record*, December 1934, pp. 435-40.

<sup>2</sup> H. D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bureau International du Travail, *Bibliothèques Populaires et Loisirs Ouvriers* (Paris: Société des Nations, Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle, 1933).

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indeed, been responsible for an almost complete reversal of policy in some instances.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the contributions of sociology, psychology, economics, and political science to the theory of book selection, history and geography seem less spectacular, but they will none the less repay investigation. From history we have already learned something of the social trends and movements which were largely responsible for the contemporary principles and objectives of public library policy. These principles and objectives directly affected the current book selection. With reference to actual reading, history may contribute to our knowledge of its nature and effect at different periods, and its relation to contemporary events, although it may be more logical for the study of reading to be subsidiary to that of history. A mutual relationship exists, however.

Finally, the factor of geographical distribution of libraries and reading material; the nature of reading in different areas; its relation to relevant local factors; and the effect of habitat on culture as reflected in reading, are all considerations important for librarians.<sup>2</sup> It only remains to indicate their importance for book selection, since it must eventually be decided for them, as it must be for the sociological, psychological, economic, and other data once they are available, to what extent such considerations shall determine the province and the function of the public library.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. G. E. Kallmann, "German Public Libraries and Their Principles of Book Selection," *Library Association Record*, June 1934, pp. 169-72.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, the articles by Dr. L. R. Wilson on the subject of reading as a Southern problem and questions of distribution. L. M. Morsch (ed.), *Library Literature*, 1921-1932 (Chicago: American Library Association, 1934).

## THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BASES

Now that the intrinsic value of the book has been referred to literary standards, and the incidental value to data concerning actual reading, readers' interests, motives, ability, and other differences, we may anticipate a certain incompatibility between the two. Either our standards of taste must be adapted to the requirements of readers; or conversely, only those needs will be provided for which are conformable with principles of literary excellence.

This calls for a third section dealing with the administrative function of the public library in so far as that function relates to the problem of book selection.

## CHAPTER IX

THE ADMINISTRATIVE BASES. PRACTICAL  
CONSIDERATIONS

THE sphere of the administrative function in book selection as conceived in this study is to evolve standards of social value. Standards are essential in order to interpret and evaluate the data afforded by the disciplines concerned with the social philosophy of the library, the nature of the book, and the behaviour of readers. For while the analyses of these three aspects may indicate the bases of a theory of book selection, they do not in themselves represent the specific objectives by which the actual practice will be determined. The enunciation of definite social attitudes or ideals, deduced from an examination and interpretation of public library history, cannot simplify the process of selection; no more can the attempt to predicate reformative, educational, democratic, or popular *attitudes* as *principles* of book selection in terms of generalizations such as Good Literature, Cultural Idealism, Good Citizenship, Moral Uplift, and the like. For when we come to examine the definitions of these terms, we often find them unsatisfactory as principles of book selection.

It was the express purpose of this study to avoid confusing the general ideals of the public library with the specific objectives of book selection. For no matter what social ideals may be formulated for the library,

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they will be the ultimate ends, and not the immediate means of book selection. The librarian cannot choose books by reference to ideals, although he may justify his choice by them.

As far as the *means* of book selection are concerned—and we must again emphasize their separateness from the ends—we began by examining the nature of the book and then turned to the requirements of the reader. We decided that while the book has intrinsic and absolute values for the literary critic, these values are, in the eyes of the book selector, incidental or relative to the needs of the reader. Yet the selector cannot afford to ignore either, and so it becomes imperative to postulate a standard of values to appraise the conflicting interests.

More specifically, the administrative function of book selection relates to the social objectives of the public library, objectives (as distinct from attitudes) which are not found to be implicit in the history of the institution itself, nor in an examination of the book and the reader. Even if we knew what was intrinsically a "good" book, or, in the terms of this study, the standards which constitute literary excellence; and if to this knowledge were added data concerning readers' actual requirements, our theory of book selection would still be incomplete if it did not define which standards were to be followed, which requirements were to be met, and the relation of one to the other.

The argument can best be illustrated by reference to the claim sometimes made that the public library should be all things to all men, a claim which seems to be present in the following definition:

The public library offers to all the material for building human life so far as that material can come from human



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records. A right use of the material thus offered would make any individual in the community a wiser, better, bigger personality—whether man, woman, or child.<sup>1</sup>

If this were a possible theory, there would be no need to differentiate between literary standards and readers' needs. Both would be sufficient in themselves. But in point of fact, not even the greatest collections in the world can be all things to all men, but such collections rapidly assume a specialized function within the limits (even in the case of national depositories) of the needs of certain minority groups such as scholars, scientists, and students.

The public library must also recognize its limitations, as the learned and specialized libraries recognize theirs; and its problem is to compromise between the initial plurality of its function and the specific objectives of efficient service. This it cannot do simply by observing standards of taste on the one hand or by fulfilling actual readers' requirements as far as funds will permit on the other. For such a policy would not only mean that many large groups in the reading community were totally neglected, but it would necessitate repudiating either the utilitarian or humanist standard, which our interpretation has shown to be the underlying purpose of the institution.

Our argument points once more, then, to the need for social objectives, meaning criteria of social value, by which to judge, prefer, or reconcile standards of taste and community reading needs. The formulation of these criteria will be the principal administrative function of public library book selection, and the

<sup>1</sup> E. Lord, *The Free Public Library* (Chicago: A. L. A., 1914), p. 5. See also A. E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: Appleton, 1929), pp. 1-4.

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procedure comprises not simply what at present passes for library science, but co-operation with any discipline which can contribute something to an elucidation of the problem. For it is evident that we are not now merely concerned with literary excellence or actual reading, but with social activity in general. In this respect, the librarian, like the teacher, must look beyond the four walls of his institution in an attempt to see what is its relationship with other social agencies, and what social activity is most relevant to the work and purposes of the library. As one educational writer says:

The school system (and so, the public library) in a dynamic society is charged with the . . . responsibility of elevating and directing the progress of the social group. To do this it must set up some goals for society to reach. . . . It must examine present social life to discover present trends. These trends must be evaluated in terms of their contribution to the goals which have been set up. The result should be a harmonious relationship between trends and goals so that the changes in social life may be raised and directed towards some well-defined, desirable end.<sup>1</sup>

This suggests a systematic analysis of some kind, and the student of reading will turn to those social sciences whose province is community survey.<sup>2</sup> It will also necessitate the statement of some criteria whereby to select those social activities and needs of most worth. Questions will arise such as, Is this or that

<sup>1</sup> T. L. Hopkins, *Curriculum Principles and Practices* (Chicago : B. H. Sanborn, 1929), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> See H. W. Odum and K. Jocher, *An Introduction to Social Research* (New York : Henry Holt, 1929) ; G. A. Lundberg, *Social Research* (New York : Longmans, Green, 1929) ; and the President's Research Committee, *Recent Social Trends* (New York : McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1933).

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objective socially desirable? Is it best realized by the public library through the medium of books? Is it justified by the character, size, or demand of a particular group? and in the formulation of such criteria the librarian may refer to those departments of knowledge which, like Ethics, Religion, Political Philosophy, Public Education, and Public Administration, are most concerned with social values.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, are some of the values which will serve the librarian for criteria in his book selection, and whence may they be derived? To take the simplest examples first, we turn our attention for a moment to the denominational libraries, whether religious or political, which, in the former case at least, once held such a strong place among the reading facilities of England and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Of this kind were those early nineteenth-century predecessors of the public library, the parochial, catechetical, missionary, and itinerating libraries promoted and organized by ministers of the church.<sup>3</sup>

In such libraries the policy and practice of book selection were simplified by reference to established religious and moral principles. We have seen in the

<sup>1</sup> In the field of normative and social sciences it is only possible to refer to bibliographies in encyclopædias. See, for instance, *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*. (New York: Macmillan, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> J. Minto, "Parochial Libraries," *History of the Public Library Movement in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Allen & Unwin and the Library Association, 1932), 24-33; and W. D. Houlette, "Parish Libraries and the Work of the Reverend Thomas Bray," *Library Quarterly*, October 1934, pp. 588-609.

<sup>3</sup> For a notice on the work of these ministers, see articles and bibliography under Dr. Thomas Bray, Rev. James Kirkwood, and Provost Samuel Brown in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

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historical introduction that some of the latter principles were originally intended to apply to the public library, as a check on the current evils of inebriety, crime, and general social instability. But once the specific and direct objectives of religion and conventional morality were obscured by other considerations, such as education, recreation, and popular preference, the aims and functions of the library became proportionately complicated and confused.

We do not intend to imply by these remarks that the public library should adapt its book selection to meet conventional religious and moral requirements. On the other hand, there are questions which can be settled only by reference to these disciplines, as a consideration of the issues involved in certain perennial controversies will show. Out of the controversy concerning the religious and moral values of reading has emerged the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, a result of book selection based on sectarian principles. So, too, the various systems of censorship determined by current morality bear testimony to the partial dependence of book selection on ethical theory.<sup>1</sup>

The relation of book selection to accepted tenets of political philosophy is observable in the policy of the special libraries of political groups, and particularly in the libraries of those countries under some form of dictatorship. We are told of the Soviet libraries, for instance, that:

All material classified as counter-revolutionary has been eliminated from the libraries, and a vigorous censorship exists over books and periodicals published by organizations

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the moral values involved in censorship, see H. Ellis, "The Revaluation of Obscenity," *More Essays of Love and Virtue* (London: Constable, 1931), pp. 119-32.

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other than the State Press. . . . The Community Party Press holds the monopoly for the publication of newspapers. Works devoted to the church and religious problems are ruthlessly suppressed, with the exception of those dealing with anti-religious propaganda. . . . In 1929 almost 45 per cent. of the total number of books published were communist propaganda.<sup>1</sup>

And what holds good of the Communist attitude towards libraries and literature applies, with due changes in political philosophy, to other absolutist states.<sup>2</sup> In all of them the political values of reading have been scrutinized and evaluated by specific standards. This process, of course, may be more political than philosophical if the standards are based on immediate self-interest instead of the ultimate common good. But surely this makes the need for a truly philosophical examination of reading in terms of political values all the more imperative,<sup>3</sup> lest false ones are set up by the egoists and self-seekers who well realize the effectiveness of reading and the place of libraries in bringing about their own ends.

Reference was made to public education and public administration as departments of knowledge incidentally concerned with social values. Their concern is,

<sup>1</sup> M. Richings, "Libraries in the U.S.S.R.," *Library Association Record*, November 1932, pp. 329-30.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for instance, G. E. Kallmann, "The Public Library System in Germany Today," *Library Association Record*, April 1935, p. 147 :

" 'Public' Libraries are defined as follows :

' Those which consider their work as a public function in the sense of the National Socialist renovation and recognize State supervision in all fundamental questions.' "

<sup>3</sup> Among the recent analyses of political forces and trends, we select Q. Wright (ed.), *Public Opinion and World Politics* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1933).

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however, only incidental in comparison with those normative fields which have no administrative problems to distract them. But although public education and public administration are practical sciences, they do have something to contribute to a theory of book selection, which, like them, should be quite as much interested in standards as in purely practical problems. As far as education is concerned, there is a well-developed philosophy, which was fortunate enough to be initiated by Plato and which has commanded the attention of profound thinkers ever since;<sup>1</sup> and not only will many of the findings of that philosophy apply directly to a theory of book selection, but its scholarship, scope, methodology, and implications should impress librarians with their own deficiencies in this department of library thought.

Public administration, like librarianship, is a much younger science than education, and where it postulates social objectives, it must do so largely by reference to other disciplines. An administrative issue of major importance to librarians, for instance, is a problem succinctly stated by a student in the public administration field:

The first problem confronting the public library is the demonstration of its social utility in terms of functions performed and costs imposed. Whether public libraries have a valid claim for a portion of the public funds depends not only upon the demand, character, quality, and cost of library service, but also upon the demand for and cost of other public functions. The support of a library can only be justified if there are no other more important activities to be financed by government, and if the costs of such services do not exceed the expense of securing the same

<sup>1</sup> J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education : an Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York : Macmillan, 1929).

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service in some other manner. The major fiscal problem of the government lies in the balancing of public functions and in making choices between those things to be done and those to be left undone.<sup>1</sup>

The choice "between those things to be done and those to be left undone" refers the standards of public administration, as it refers those of public education and book selection, back to the normative sciences touched upon above, but an approach such as Leland's to the problems of librarianship through the methods of public administration, serves its purpose of indicating the relationship between the two.

If we summarize the administrative problem confronting the book selector as primarily a sociological one of community analysis, the procedure will consist of taking a valid sample of the general reading population—and not merely of the library clientele—and classifying readers according to homogeneous groups. This classification will take into account such traits as sex, age, occupation, education, and any others which have been shown to correlate significantly with actual reading.<sup>2</sup> Then an analysis of the groups' formal activities, of their social needs, and their reading interests, will suggest certain requirements and deficiencies, some of which will be within the province of the library to fulfil.<sup>3</sup> These, when evaluated by standards

<sup>1</sup> S. E. Leland, "Observations on Financing Libraries," *Library Quarterly*, October 1932, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup> See W. S. Gray, *Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1925).

<sup>3</sup> The method of activity analysis has been considerably investigated by educational theory, and notably in the division of curriculum construction. See "The Foundations and Technique of Curriculum Construction," *26th Yearbook of the N.S.S.E.* (Bloomington, Ill.; Public School Publishing Co., 1926).

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inherent in the library's social and local purpose, will represent the desirable objectives of book selection. These objectives, in their turn, will be represented by corresponding subjects from which the specific books will be chosen according to standards based on the nature of the book and of reading. It will have become increasingly apparent throughout this study that no suggestions have been made towards overcoming the practical difficulties of such a complex procedure. Therefore, one frequent objection will be that it is impractical, or too impractical for any but the largest library in a position to support a staff of research assistants.

One evasive reply to such criticism is that it is not required of theory to discuss problems of practical administration. On the other hand, the suggestions here put forward are by no means impracticable nor dependent upon a perfect library system for their application. To the contrary, they seem to offer the only systematic procedure towards a planned economy of reading distribution within a given community. And so the practical objections will be met by intimating that such a theory as this can only be put to the test if librarians, instead of considering it (or any other theory for that matter) in terms of their own resources, anticipate a body of common data to be contributed to, or drawn upon, in a spirit of scientific collaboration. It is, indeed, this need for such collaboration which is here returned as part answer to objections that the benefit would not justify the additional labour required of individual libraries. It is further suggested that no general body of data pertinent either to the theory or the practice of book selection exists for the study of problems common to all public libraries. Each



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particular library and each individual librarian is concerned almost exclusively with his own problems, and seldom turns his attention towards the basic theory which is essential to any science. In this respect, there is no theory of book selection, since there are no generally approved standards by which particular practices may be evaluated. Moreover, there has not been a sufficient accumulation of source materials in the form of adequate records necessary for the formulation of defensible principles of book selection.

Some branches of librarianship have been more fortunate. There is, for instance, the field of bibliography characterized by a general theory, basic principles, and common sources of data. A comparable claim may be made for Classification and Cataloguing. In each of these divisions of library science, there has been sufficient collaboration ultimately to produce fundamental theories, codes, and techniques.

The answer, then, to the objections against a general theory of book selection on the grounds that it is impractical, will be a reference to other library problems which have been solved by an analytical instead of a speculative approach. We must also note that no division of knowledge can exist, as it were, in a vacuum, but that all must rely to some extent upon contingent disciplines and their relevant data. Bibliography has drawn, among others, from history and literature for the elucidation of its problems, and in the case of Proctor's method borrowed the comparative method of biology. Palæography has turned to diplomatics, Classification to logic, Cataloguing to documentation, Library Administration to local government administration and so on. But book selection is largely independent of related disciplines, keeps only a nodding acquaintance

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with literary criticism, psychology, and sociology, and largely ignores the theory of æsthetics, political philosophy, and the history of scholarship. Consequently there is no general method, no common body of data increased and clarified by well-directed experimentation; to the contrary, there is only an individual searching for some workable method, often based on the conviction that the law of supply and demand is the most reliable guiding principle. For the rest, the book selector depends on his own competence.

Even where competence is eminently superior to any formal precepts, however, it is still the function of science to analyse the principles and postulate the laws underlying the process, and it has been the purpose of this study to suggest some of the principles or bases on which efficient book selection, whether subjective or not, must ultimately depend.



## PART III

## THE PRACTICE OF BOOK SELECTION

## THE LIBRARY AS A LABORATORY



## CHAPTER X

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF PRACTICAL BOOK  
SELECTION

THE second part of this study has dealt almost entirely with the general principles of book selection to the apparent neglect of the multiple practical problems which beset the librarian proper. To this latter the discussion of the broad implications of his craft may seem rather profitless unless they can be translated into terms of everyday practice.

In this third division an attempt will be made to meet the problems, objections, or queries of practising librarians. Henceforth, our discussion will be of the particular library rather than of libraries in general; of the actual methods for book selection rather than of the fundamental principles upon which a theory might be based.

It is essential to emphasize once again, however, the interdependence of theory and practice; more, the danger of disassociating them as though the former were an angle of the subject to be discussed only at association conferences and the latter a routine job best left to a strictly empirical method of trial and error. The main purpose of this, the third part of the study, is to evolve those methods best calculated to realize the objectives and principles laid down in the preceding chapters.

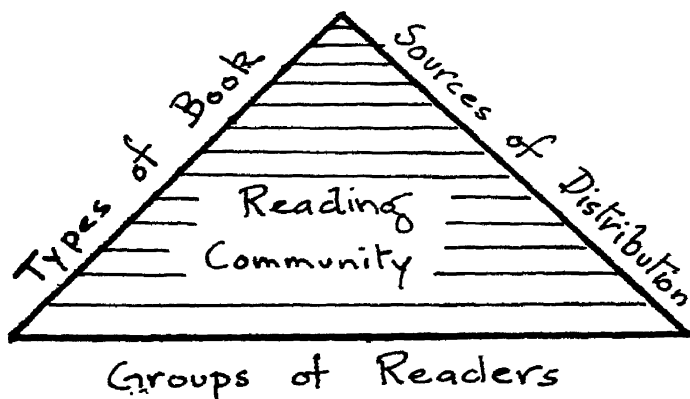
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What were those objectives and principles? They have already been discussed in some detail in the first chapter of the second book and need not, therefore, be discussed again at this point. But it will be well to recall that the *social* criterion of service was stressed, and that this emphasis led us to speak in terms of utility and healthful recreation: on the grounds that the library's obligations are not individual but collective objectives, to be measured in terms of social, not private, advantage.

Now the recognition and acceptance of these social functions and purposes of the library will be seen to determine the methods and practices of book selection. For according to this interpretation, these methods and practices will best be realized by sociological rather than bibliographical techniques. In plainer terms, the community will be the unit of service rather than the individual. The type of book will be more important in the public library than the individual volume. And the whole population of the library district will occupy the librarian's attention as well as the library's actual clientele. The question of book selection is envisaged, therefore, not as a problem of selecting a certain number of new books each week without any particular reading group in mind; but as the consideration of three inter-related factors: groups of readers in relation to kinds of book in relation to sources of distribution. One is tempted to put this concept in diagrammatic form, so clearly does the triangle illustrate the interdependence of its three sides.

From the following diagram it can be seen that a survey of the reading community can best be made by a study of each of the three limiting sides; and this is what we shall

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proceed to do in the following chapters, on the assumption that the most suitable book selection will be that which realizes the objectives of social service through a knowledge of the community to be served.

In so far, however, as a problem of this scope is easier handled when broken down into more primary factors, we shall proceed, as in the case of our discussion of the literary, sociological, and administrative bases of book selection, to examine each factor separately, although in actuality it is impossible to speak of a reader without implying something read and some source of supply. And all of these factors are of like importance in the composite picture the book selector should have of his particular province of librarianship. Why, we shall attempt to show in the subsequent chapters; but first in the next chapter the area within the triangle is to be considered; namely, this concept of the reading community. And inasmuch as community surveys are comparatively new and strange in library method, the nature and purpose of such an analysis will be briefly outlined.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

THE community survey as a method for the scientific study of social phenomena is of quite recent origin, dating back no farther than the middle of the nineteenth century with the publication of Frédéric Le Play's *Ouvriers Européens*,<sup>1</sup> a careful and objective analysis of the working classes. In England, Charles Booth's monumental *Life and Labour of the People in London*<sup>2</sup> was the first community survey made by means of an extensive, organized, and co-ordinated "field investigation." Booth, it should be noted, took into account not only the material factors of conditions and environment, but estimated as objectively as possible the place and influence of more intangible forces—education, religion, leisure, and so forth—upon the lives of the people.

It will be noted at once that a survey of this kind is both scientific and social. It is scientific, that is, in method; and social in application. There has been, of course, and indeed still is considerable controversy as to the possibility of *social science*; but this, as

<sup>1</sup> P. G. F. Le Play, *Les Ouvriers Européens* (Tours : A. Mame et fils ; Paris : Dentu, 1877-9).

<sup>2</sup> C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (London : Macmillan, 1892-7).

## NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

Pearson points out, is due to an initial prejudice or misunderstanding of the nature of science. For he maintains that:

The scientific method is one and the same in all branches and the method is the method of all logically trained minds. . . . The unity of all science consists in its method, not in its material alone. . . . It is not the facts which make science, but the methods by which they are dealt with.<sup>1</sup>

If, then, we accept science as a method of treating observed phenomena and not as a body of facts, we can agree that sociology is a science; that social surveys can be conducted in a scientific manner; and that book selection, in so far as it depends upon a knowledge of community book needs, can profit from certain scientific methods.

Let us commence, then, with postulating a hypothetical library which wishes to regulate its book selection by such scientific methods. First of all, it will be necessary to examine the assumptions which have determined the library's book policy hitherto. These, judging from a general examination of library literature and practice, might be stated as follows:

1. That the circulation of books or of classes of books is directly proportionate to their popularity and that new books should be added to the library on the basis of this implied popularity;
2. That a "well-rounded" collection of books will meet the needs of all classes of readers; and that certain books should be added irrespective of their estimated use;
3. That the inclusion of light fiction is justified on the grounds that it represents a *popular* demand; and,

<sup>1</sup> Karl Pearson, *The Grammar of Science*. 3rd ed. (London: Black, 1911).

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4. That the public library is a democratic institution and should not, therefore, cater to any one group more than to another; but, as far as is expedient, to all.

These, then, together with many other generalized principles, to the effect that the public should be uplifted, educated, or amused, represent the major assumptions upon which much book selection has been tacitly based. The researcher will question them as he will question all hypotheses, and will set about collecting a body of data which will provide him with more precise and objective criteria of evaluation.

Now there are certain questions which will seem to the student of reading to have an obvious bearing upon efficient book selection. He will be curious to know, for instance, what percentage of the population are serious and habitual readers; what percentage of them use the public library; what sources of literature the others rely upon; and the reasons for these things. It is possible that he can with this information evaluate more objectively the library's efficiency.

The next problem to examine is: what do people read? Librarians are often inclined to think their readers representative of the whole community. They can point, as C. H. Compton pointed, to examples of a manicurist, four dressmakers, a furrier's wife, and five waiters as occasional readers of Thomas Hardy, as though to imply that Hardy were generally popular throughout the community. And so with other writers.<sup>1</sup> But this hand-picking of remarkable instances does not give a true picture of the state of reading in any community. To do this, all classes of readers must be

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Compton, *Who Reads What?* (New York: Wilson, 1934), pp. 35-52.

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investigated, and these classes or groups classified according to characteristics as homologous as possible. By general agreement, the most satisfactory categories are sex, education, occupation, age, with other definite group characteristics, if they can be objectively defined. For it has long been known that similarity of material conditions is paralleled by similarity of interests (reading interests among them) within different social groups: that, in general, any group of men of the same race, nationality, sex, age, educational and occupational level, will like, think, and read much the same things. This does not envisage a social group as a number of identically similar individuals like the economic divisions in Huxley's *Brave New World*. There will, of course, be as many individual variations as there are individuals; yet, none the less, common environmental influences will tend to produce a common type. From the point of view of group security, it is fortunate that it does.

The book selector can profit from this sociological technique for identifying homogeneous groups by the use of small samples to discover the character of large populations. And if he can discover the reading needs and interests of those groups which constitute his library clientele, both actual and potential, he will be materially nearer to a well-regulated system of book selection.

The second step, after investigating what percentage of the whole population are serious and habitual readers and what percentage of these make use of the library, will be to discover what social groups are found among the library's actual users; and how they compare numerically with the other groups in the community. The comparison will be one objective standard

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of service. For if the library patronage is truly representative of the whole community, the service can be claimed to be democratic; but if the discrepancy is great, the service must be judged inadequate in this respect.

A consideration of these matters will lead the librarian to the investigation of a third factor: the sources and amount of reading material available to readers. This has been one of the most neglected aspects of library affairs, although of late the presence of such sources has been brought home to librarians in the encroachments of circulating and twopenny libraries. There is a very specific problem here for the book selector. To what extent should he compete with and duplicate the stock of commercial libraries? Before he can answer this question, he must at least know what that stock is and who is borrowing it. Possibly it is fiction which the library would not offer in any case. And possibly the people who are reading it are neither actual nor potential patrons of the public library. But these are problems best answered by figures, not speculation.

A further consideration is the amount of reading actually done in contrast to the amount available. The procedure in this case will be quite simple: a comparison of the number of books in the library—the scope and sizes of subject classes—with the use made of them. The conclusions should not be based upon a direct assertion that the number of books and the size of the classes ought to vary in direct proportion with the use made of them. Usefulness, as we have stated elsewhere, cannot be measured in terms of gross circulation figures. And in any case, as studies have already shown, there is no simple relationship between the number of library borrowers and the number of

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actual loans; for, as Figure 3 suggests, it may be a few readers who borrow many books while many readers borrow only a few books, so that circulation figures are not a fair index of the *communal* use of the library.

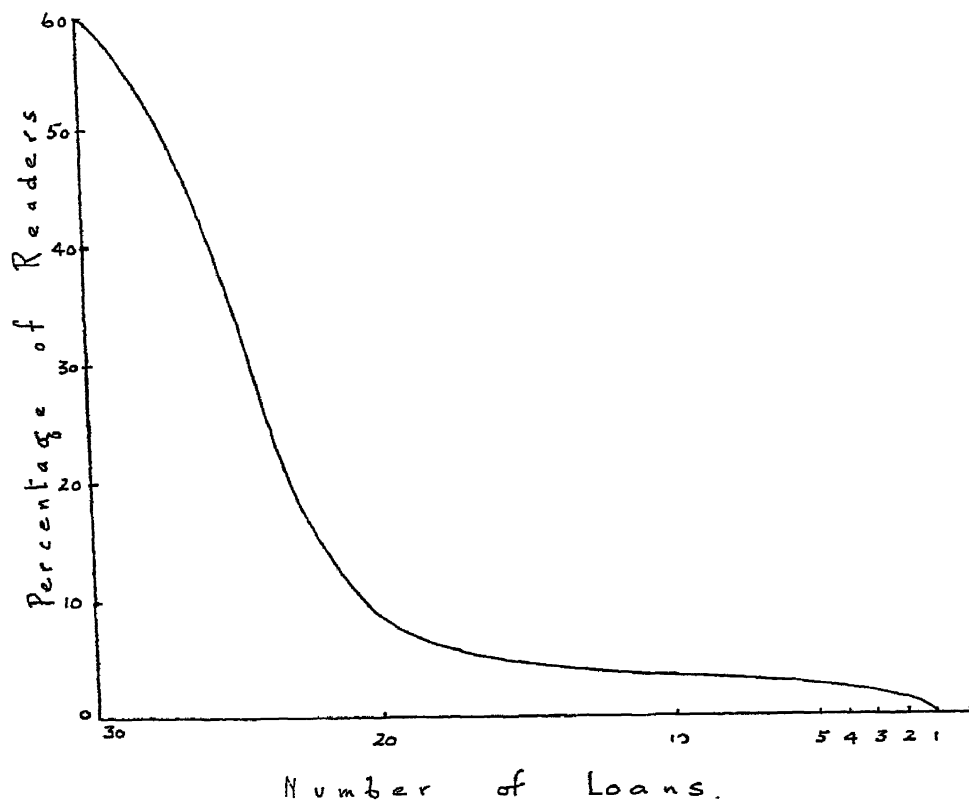


FIG. 3. Relationship between Number of Loans and Individual Borrowers (in an American Library).

Waples comments as follows:

A sample of 5,578 loans shows about one-third of the card holders reading something. Two per cent. of the readers account for 10 per cent. of the loans; and 6 per cent. for 21 per cent. of the loans. Thereafter the ratios fall off,

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till we have 60 per cent. of the readers accounting for only 30 per cent. of the loans. In other words, this means that most of the card holders read very little, and a few of them read very much.<sup>1</sup>

A fifth problem for investigation will be what subjects are of most interest to readers. In examining this question, the easy assumption that popularity is synonymous with interest in reading must be carefully tested in the light of the findings of Waples and Carnovsky on the relationship between reading interest and actual reading.<sup>2</sup> Waples found, in fact, that interest was not the major factor in the determination of reading:

Taken as a whole, the contents of these tables support the general finding that no significantly positive relationship exists between the subjects of most interest and the subjects on which the industrial groups do most reading. The interpretations supplied in this paper, however, go beyond this fact to conditions that help to explain it. They suggest very plainly what every librarian knows, namely (1) that accessibility, whether represented by space in the given newspapers, or selection of magazines, or availability of books, is perhaps the most important single influence upon actual reading, except for readers in highly specialized fields who will take any amount of trouble to obtain an important reference; (2) that "readability," as analysed on page 43, is the next important influence, and (3) that accessibility and readability in combination virtually determine what the general reader reads.

<sup>1</sup> D. Waples, "Community Studies in Reading. I," *Library Quarterly*, January 1933, pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> D. Waples, "The Relation of Subject Interests to Actual Reading," *Library Quarterly*, January 1932, pp. 42-70, and L. Carnovsky, "Study of the Relationship between Reading Interest and Actual Reading," *Library Quarterly*, January 1934, pp. 76-110.

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What every librarian does not know, and what has probably not been demonstrated before in equally objective terms, is that so small a proportion of the "readable" printed matter available to the American citizen is concerned with the particular questions upon which he most wants to read. It is altogether probable that this condition applies to the half of the total adult population that has been estimated to read little but newspapers. If so, the publisher, librarian, book dealer, or teacher who brings interesting and trustworthy reading on the desired subjects within easy reach of the multitude will deserve well of his country. The possibilities of this achievement obviously depend upon such further studies as may furnish group standards for "readability" and "accessibility" that the publisher and librarian may put to practical use.<sup>1</sup>

It appears, then, that the customary conviction that people read what they want may be incorrect; to the contrary, their choice of a book is often a compromise between their wishes and the library's resources. This fact is quite obvious, of course, to every desk assistant, who must constantly inform inquirers that the book they need is either not in the library or not available for immediate issue. But while this fact is brought home clearly enough to the assistant in contact with the public, it is often overlooked by the commentator who relies implicitly on the circulation figures to tell the story of the library's use and to determine, incidentally, the book selection policy. In order to interpret the circulation figures accurately, they must be contrasted with definite reading interest figures. The greater the divergence, the less useful the library; the nearer the similarity, the more efficient the book selection. But without some objective data on the different groups' actual reading needs, neither

<sup>1</sup> Waples, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.



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circulation figures nor book selection are satisfactory.

Postponing for a time our discussion of the actual methods of obtaining these and the other desirable data referred to in the present chapter, let us fully recognize the importance of knowing what library users *want* to read about as well as what they *do* read. For if the librarian had some positive facts about his patrons' interests, he would presumably compare them not only with his circulation statistics but also with his existing collection with the object of discovering the relationships between the three and of remedying any palpable deficiencies. He would probably find, if there were not sufficient correlation between interest and actual reading, that his collection was at fault: that books on the required subjects were not available. On the other hand, he might find that his collection was *numerically* sufficient. This would then lead him to suspect that the style rather than the content of the books was at fault, although other factors might be equally responsible for interesting subjects not being read. Borrowers might not be able to find their way round in a too specialized classification scheme, for instance. Again, the worn or unattractive appearance of the books might deter some borrowers from taking them out. Or their inaccessibility on the shelves or in special collections might discourage the reader. But, on the whole, it is more likely to be the unsuitability of the style and presentation which are the causes of a book's neglect—however interesting its subject. It may be too technical, too advanced, or too stodgy in treatment. So that the book selector's task will not finish with an examination of readers' actual interests, but must go on to include an examination of their

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reading ability. Anything too elaborate or "psychological" in this respect will be impracticable for the public library; on the other hand, attention should be given to the researches of theoretical workers such as Thorndike<sup>1</sup>; to the practical treatment of the matter such as Hofmann's<sup>2</sup>; and to the experience of readers' advisers wherever their investigations are available for study and profit.<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, the book selector can use what indices he has as they are suggested by his statistics of readers' age and educational qualifications. For instance, if he discovers that a certain homogeneous group within the limits of a common age, occupation, and education have a preference for books on economic theory, he may be able to guess with a fair degree of accuracy the type of book most suited to their reading ability; if, however, the available books on economics are above or below that general ability, they will certainly not be used in proportion to their potential interest.

Quite the most practicable way of coping with this problem is undoubtedly the "reader's adviser," an officer who is not usually found in a British library, although he is the nerve centre, as it were, of an American lending system. For the reader's adviser will gradually compile a collection of most important facts, facts which may be correlated and interpreted to indicate definite reading needs, preferences, motives, and results.

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, E. L. Thorndike, *A Teacher's Word Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); and "The Vocabularies of Juvenile Books," *Library Quarterly*, April 1935, pp. 151-63.

<sup>2</sup> W. Hofmann, *Die Lektüre der Frau* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931).

<sup>3</sup> D. L. Hoit, *Books of General Interest* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1934).

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Moreover, the reader's adviser is in a position to learn many of the significant factors about a borrower which an unelastic and impersonal questionnaire cannot extract from him. The reader's adviser gets nearest to the vexed questions of motive and influence. His findings can be so much more thorough and reliable than those of a general group survey in proportion as they are fewer and more specialized. Thus they serve as a very valuable check on the generalized data obtained from question blanks, and they provide some light on that most important though least understood aspect of reading studies, the causes and effects of reading.

At the same time, the reader's adviser will do well to base his handling of particular cases on the general findings of the group study. Thus, if he learns that such and such a borrower belongs to such and such a group as specified in terms of sex, age, occupation, education, and expected reading interest, he will adapt his approach and treatment of the inquiry accordingly. The individual variations he may find necessary will not on the whole invalidate the work already done by the less fine tools of research.

For those who are intrigued by the social implications, by the social importance and influence of reading, the question of who reads what and why he reads it will afford an interesting and thorny problem for investigation. The examination of the preferred books of the different social groups may appeal to some as suggestive of social and intellectual indices. No one, I assume, would doubt the validity of the theory that "good" reading is beneficial in some intangible way, just as no one would doubt the converse, that an unvaried preference for inferior entertainment of any kind is

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indicative of an inferior ethics and intelligence. It is all very well to say that light reading is a form of relaxation; but the continuous absorption of trashy literature will inevitably result in the superficial and unrealistic attitude, which invariably characterizes such literature. And this implies that reading is an index of intelligence. Investigations may conceivably show that it is an equally valid index of social attitude. If they do, the book selector will have still another definite standard to guide his choice of literature; and the perennial problem of the right proportion of cheap fiction in public libraries may be solved by incontrovertible evidence instead of by compromises with circulation statistics.

Seven questions for investigation have been postulated in the foregoing pages. So far no techniques for answering them have been more than suggested. Before going on to indicate the possibilities of so doing, let us first tabulate these questions and then consider them against the general background of our hypothetical community. The questions are:

1. What proportion of the population of any given community uses the public library ?
2. What social groups do these users belong to ?
3. What sources of reading are there in the community other than the public libraries ?
4. What subjects are most read ?
5. What subjects are of most interest ?
6. What groups and individuals read what books ?
7. What titles are most read, and by whom ?

The contention is that an investigation of these aspects of reading, both within and without the library, will provide the librarian and book selector with a far

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more comprehensive and accurate knowledge of the place of literature in his community than his present intuitive judgment can provide. It is further contended that the objective data obtained from a community survey will logically suggest certain generalized methods of book selection, methods which may be modified according to the requirements of particular cases.

It is essential to realize that an adequate knowledge of the community does not end with a survey of reading alone. Reading is as closely integrated with the readers' other activities as the library is, or should be, integrated with schools, clubs, churches, and the other local institutions for intellectual and cultural advancement. Reading, therefore, should not be surveyed as an independent social activity—any more than the library should be historically studied as an isolated social organism—but against the background of society's cultural life in general. To be more specific: the librarian who wishes to do a thorough job of community surveying, will remember that his work, if well and comprehensively done, will be of value not only to his own and other libraries, but also to social historians in general and to his community in particular. It will be objected that the preparation and compilation of a local history is a specialized and lengthy process. The answer is that the librarian's survey need be neither specialized nor lengthy.

An attempt has been made at a *general* social history of the public library in the first chapters of this study. A few studies of the place of a particular library in a particular community have been published. But there seems to be only one major attempt to examine the cultural life of a community as the setting against which

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reading and the public library are projected. This study is Miss Grace Kelley's *Woodside Does Read!*—a survey of the reading interests and habits of a local community.<sup>1</sup> The nature and scope of this survey is defined as follows:

At an early stage in any local survey, it is necessary to define the area to be examined in order to limit the work and to conserve the efforts of the people engaged in the survey. In making this definition it is usually desirable to explain why certain boundaries were taken and others were not. This in turn makes necessary an estimation of the influence of topographical features, transportation facilities, and habit or custom upon the inhabitants of the area surveyed.<sup>2</sup>

The references to boundaries, topographical features, and transport facilities might seem redundant until we remember the importance of these factors in determining the use and usefulness of libraries. Boundaries for their part may be found, as in the case of some of the London boroughs, to be purely artificial in comparison with the industrial and cultural homogeneity of neighbouring communities. This may call for the redivision of library districts into units composed of such identifiable areas instead of into boroughs, as to-day in London. This, however, presupposes a quite different attitude towards regional co-operation than that at present adopted in large cities.

But waiving the importance to a regional system of a

<sup>1</sup> G. O. Kelley, *Woodside Does Read!* (Jamaica, New York: privately printed (planograph process), 1935). The reader should note that this survey is quoted in order to illustrate the scope rather than the methods of community analysis.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

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topographical survey we can emphasize for the time being the value to the individual library of knowing something about the way in which a district grew and attained to a unity and autonomy of its own. Land development, industrialization, the influx of population, and the building of dwellings are all factors which will have determined the character of a district in a distinctive way; and they are all factors which indirectly affect the book selection of the library. To take a single example. The Borough of Bermondsey in London has grown rapidly in industry, building, and population within the last fifty years. For a time the major industry was tanning. There are signs, however, that tanning is decreasing in Bermondsey and is moving out. Other industries and new factories are taking its place. At the same time, the Borough Council has pursued such an energetic programme of social improvement—new clinics, baths, slum clearance, model buildings, tree-lined streets, etc., that a careful observer of Bermondsey can see that the district is on an uptrend as far as social conditions and individual standards are concerned.

These and like facts are of great importance to the librarian as book selector. Often he will comprehend the situation without recourse to extensive and expensive surveys. He will be able to judge from the use of his library; from the patronage of cultural activities he organizes; from the co-operation he receives from and extends towards other educational agencies; and from his own observations the degree of enlightenment in his community. But there are many material characteristics which can be put down on paper for study and reference. These can be considered under the following heads:

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### 1. *The Library District*

A map of the region, showing boundaries, area, physical and industrial conditions, and the position of the library.

### 2. *Population*

Map of the region, showing population density and the distribution of library borrowers in relation to this density.

### 3. *Civic Development*

Survey of residential dwellings, schools, churches, clubs, theatres, cinemas, and so forth.

### 4. *Industrial Development*

Survey of industrial and commercial organizations.

Such, then, are the physical conditions which we will expect to find in any given neighbourhood. There are others, not definable in terms of bricks and mortar, which are equally important—characteristics which cause the population, the buildings, and the activities of the region to hold together in a unified manner. These characteristics are the social interests of the people—their livelihood, needs, and leisure activities, all of which might be classified under the heading of 5. *Social Development*. The evaluation of this intangible factor will be a matter of the individual librarian's understanding of, and sympathy with, his community; and in writing the social history of that community, he must be equally aware of the spirit as well as the frame of the social organism he is studying. If he can succeed in this synthesis, if he can succeed, that is, in indicating the general social trends and needs of his group, he will be so much the better equipped to serve his public when it comes to selecting and providing books for encouraging those trends and needs which are desirable.



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This chapter has attempted to show the need for an understanding of the community organization as a whole and the need for a knowledge of the community's reading habits and needs in particular. In the following chapter we shall proceed to discuss techniques for examining and analysing these habits and needs, which will henceforward be considered determining factors in the process of book selection.

## CHAPTER XII

## METHODS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY

## I. METHODS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH

THERE is a vast amount of literature—most of it American—on the methods of social research and community survey. Much of this is elaborated and expanded by means of technicalities, charts, formulæ, and the other equipment of the monograph writer. Such terms as “functional chart,” “relational concept,” and “organic analogies” abound, and it all strikes the layman as quite impressive and equally incomprehensible.

We are not concerned here, however, with methodology as such. We are simply concerned with the simplest and easiest ways of answering the questions postulated and discussed in the preceding chapter. None the less, it is essential to know at least the principal methods of social research, since the field we have undertaken to survey cannot be surveyed by means of personal contacts alone. For we are outside of the library now and dealing with the community at large.

Quite clearly there are three principal methods of investigating a group:

1. The intensive study of certain individual cases;
2. The careful study of a sample representative of the whole;  
and,
3. The general study of every case in the whole group.

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And equally as clearly, there are only two main sources of data upon which the investigator, whatever method he uses, can draw:

1. Historical Sources:

- (a) Written records.
- (b) Physical remains.

and

2. Field Sources:

- (a) Direct observation of behaviour.
- (b) Indirect information from others.

It will be seen at once that all of these methods and sources will be used in one study or another by libraries. The first method of investigation, the intensive study of certain individual cases, is at present the most common approach to library problems. It is, indeed, a very useful and illuminating method, provided the investigator realizes its limitations and does not go on to generalize from his particular findings. For example, Mr. Charles H. Compton in his studies of which people read what books, found that there were individual cases of "a printer, a probation officer of the Negro race, two mechanics, several salesmen, the wife of a real estate dealer, an artist, and a number of teachers and students" among the readers of William James's *A Pluralistic Universe*, *Pragmatism*, and *Some Problems of Philosophy*.<sup>1</sup> There is always a danger implicit in this kind of statement, particularly when it is popularly interpreted: the danger of generalization, of intimating that printers or mechanics or salesmen as a group are readers of William James. Stated thus, the danger may sound exaggerated; yet in actual practice,

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Compton, *Who Reads What?* (New York: Wilson, 1934), p. 93.

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generalization and rationalization are constantly being made from particularized data.

### 2. STUDIES OF THE GENERAL READING POPULATION

I see little use for this first method of individual case study in the general field of reading within a fairly large community. Its most valuable contribution will be in such branches of library study as the readers' advisory service, in which particular cases require particular instead of generalized treatment. And so with certain service problems. But when there is generalized policy and procedure under consideration, a policy and procedure based on the greatest good of the greatest number, the greatest number must be considered and therefore studied. Obviously a community of fifty thousand people cannot be studied individually or intensively. Hence, some method had to be evolved for dealing with large numbers in a practicable and efficient manner. This method was based on the use of statistics, and it is sound statistics, indeed, which characterize modern social science. The deductive and descriptive methods may be admirable for philosophical or literary treatises, but they cannot be called scientifically valid unless their data satisfy certain objective standards of reliability. These standards are based primarily upon proper sampling and appropriate statistical formulæ.

### 3. SAMPLING AS AN AID TO RESEARCH

What, then, is proper, or valid sampling? In simple and more specific terms, how can the librarian who desires to make a general survey of his community, be sure that the sample he has of it is representative of the whole? It can be replied at once that if it is large

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enough and random enough it will be reliable. But there are other important criteria to be taken into consideration, practicability being the first of them. The librarian will want, that is, as small a sample as permissible, and one that minimizes the task of selecting the representative cases. On the other hand, if the sample is not adequate, it may give a false picture of the whole. Adequacy implies that the selected cases include between them the characteristics of the group as a whole. Reliability implies that one random sample will yield similar data to another likewise taken at random.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. THE COMMUNITY AND THE LIBRARY: READING COMPARISONS

Applying these criteria of size, adequacy, and reliability to the task of sampling the reading population in a given district, we can proceed to discover whether the library borrowers represent a fair sample of the whole reading community. In order to do this, the factors relevant to reading within the community must be listed. Sex, age, education, occupation, and place of residence are some of the more obvious factors. So that the procedure would be to compare the library borrowers classified according to these characteristics with a random sample of the community as a whole. This random sample would be reliable in the statistical sense if based on the selection of every tenth name on a parliamentary list of voters, for instance.<sup>2</sup> Then, if a

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of sampling, see K. J. Holzinger, *Statistical Methods for Students in Education* (Boston: Ginn, 1928), pp. 16-19.

<sup>2</sup> The writer is speaking of English lists, which would be representative of the adult population, including students. The difference in the American and English use of the term "students" should be noted, and allowances made accordingly.

## METHODS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY

fair degree of correspondence were found between the various social and occupational groups which make up the sample and those which make up the library clientele, one may conclude that the latter is fairly representative of the whole community—an important consideration for those who uphold the democratic function of the public library. If, on the other hand, certain large groups were *not* represented among the library borrowers, one would be equally entitled to conclude that the library was not serving all reading classes in the community. Such a conclusion, of course, would incite some indignation and much controversy. But it would be more useful first to discover the reasons for the discrepancies—why this or that group did not make use of the library; and then either to justify the existing policy or to adapt the book selection to a new, more comprehensive policy.

### 5. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The sampling of the general population brings us to a discussion of techniques and sources of information. Obviously there are no historical sources for giving the librarian all the data he needs on the subject of his community's reading. In any case, his information will need periodical revision. However, he will have certain information about the reading preferences and habits of the library clientele, depending, of course, on the amount of detail incorporated in his records. In many libraries, most of the information about sex, age, occupation, and residence is already available on the application form filled out by the prospective user of the library; so that, if some facts about the individual's education are obtained, the task of classifying the

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actual borrowers into relatively discrete and homogeneous groups will be simple routine work. Some librarians, however, maintain that it is irksome to their applicants to be subjected to a cross-examination about their occupation, age, and so forth. But this is largely a matter of discretion and good judgment. If the reader is made to feel that he is important in the librarian's opinion and that he can contribute to the general efficiency of the library by volunteering the required information, it is improbable that he will raise any serious objections.

### 6. SUGGESTED APPLICATION FORM

The following is the suggested form for an application blank to elicit from would-be borrowers data directly useful to the book selector.

.....  
Name..... Sex.....  
Address .....  
Age..... Occupation.....  
School : Elementary .....  
          Secondary.....  
          Higher .....  
.....

### 7. THE CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

A form of this kind will provide the information required to answer the second question in the survey: What social groups are library patrons? For as each form comes in, its data may be tabulated according to the classification in Table VI.

## CLASSIFICATIONS OF READING GROUPS

Borrower's Name	Sex	Age	Occupation	Education	Other Traits
	Male	15-25	Professional		
	Female	26-35	Clerical		
		36-45	Skilled Labour		
		46-55	Unskilled		
		56-65	Unemployed		
		66 and over	Housewives		
				Elementary	
				Secondary	
				Higher	
Total ... ..					



## BOOK SELECTION

Under the other traits, the investigator will list any information, such as club membership, economic status, political views, which he may be able to obtain and considers relevant to the study.

### 8. GENERAL SOURCES OF COMMUNITY READING

The task of discovering what sources of reading there are in the community other than the public libraries is important in so far as such knowledge, together with the librarian's decision as to the duplication of or co-operation with such sources, is bound to affect the book selection of every public library. The controversy of the twopenny library has received much attention from public librarians, and sometimes a desire to compete with cheap commercial book agencies has been justified on the grounds that such agencies might otherwise take away the older established institution's patronage. But there are some very significant considerations introduced by this rationalization, even assuming that it is justifiable, which without figures we have no means of asserting or denying. It could be intimated, for instance, that if the community actually prefers to pay for its books rather than get them free from the library, a rate-supported system is, *ipso facto*, unnecessary. It could likewise be suggested that the public library was evidently not pleasing the public to the same extent as the commercial agencies. (Scorn of popular taste would not, in a democratic system, be sufficient answer to this argument.) Or, again, it might be that people prefer to pay twopence to avoid a longer journey to the public library, the probability of being disappointed, the difficulties of a complicated classification scheme, and the time-taking formalities sometimes involved.

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### 9. CLASSIFICATION OF DISTRIBUTING AGENCIES

But all of these statements or intimations are ineffective without evidence; and it would be to the librarian's advantage to know what are the library resources in his district and what kind of literature they supply. His findings would come under one or more of the following distributing agencies:

#### A. *Libraries (within the area studied)*

- (a) Scholarly.
- (b) Special.
- (c) Public.
- (d) Private (company, business, and such-like libraries).

#### B. *Commercial Agencies*

- (a) Subscription.
- (b) Rental (including twopenny libraries).
- (c) Bookshops and clubs.

The librarian will be interested in these literary sources from several points of view. He will want to plot their distribution and study it in relation to the public library's "sphere of influence." He will want to know what collections they have in order that he need not duplicate rare, expensive, or highly specialized books. And he will want to know something about their numbers and types of borrower in order to discover to what extent the outside agencies are meeting reading needs different from those satisfied by the public library; so that if the librarian is accused of reaching only some twelve per cent. of the total population, he can say that this statement needs modification in the light of the service undertaken by other book agencies. He can point out, that is, that this percentage of the population is taken care of by such and such an

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agency; that group by another; and of the *remainder*, the public library serves twelve (or whatever percentage it is), which will represent a considerably enhanced service.

### 10. DISTRIBUTING AGENCIES: METHODS FOR COLLECTING DATA

The methods for collecting data concerning the number, type, distribution, and service of outside agencies cannot be specified without reference to particular communities. In many cases, the relevant information will be on record—in reference books and the reports of the institutions concerned. Of course, the co-operation of outside librarians is essential: without that co-operation any attempt at a survey is futile. With it, a general overview of community reading sources is a fairly simple matter. The information required can be tabulated somewhat as in Table VII.

### 11. WHAT SUBJECTS ARE MOST READ ?

Besides the intrinsic value of such data on book agencies in general, is their incidental value in indicating, as far as the agencies' own clientele is concerned, what subjects are most read. The evidence of such diverse distributing agencies as scholarly libraries at one end of the scale and twopenny libraries at the other, should give a pretty general picture of reading as a community activity: always provided, of course, the circulation figures are broken down into something more meaningful than monthly or annual totals arranged according to Dewey's main classes. For what

TABLE VII

## CLASSIFICATION OF BOOK AGENCIES BY TYPE, DISTRIBUTION, AND SERVICE

Name of Library	Type	Situation <sup>1</sup>	Nature of Collection	No. of Borrowers	Type of Borrowers			Circulation		
					Specialists	Professional	General	Annual	Per cent. of Collection	Per cent. of Borrowers
	A. Libraries proper : <i>a.</i> scholarly. <i>b.</i> special. <i>c.</i> public. <i>d.</i> private.  B. Commercial : <i>a.</i> subscription. <i>b.</i> rental. <i>c.</i> bookshops.									

<sup>1</sup> The area being surveyed should be divided up, if possible, into tracts determined by natural boundaries. The tracts, of course, are given numbers for convenience in tabulation.

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the student of reading wants to know is what *subjects*, not what divisions of knowledge, are most read. Therefore it is suggested that the *gross* circulation figures be broken down into (a) particularized reading groups according to the classification outlined in Table VI; and into (b) discrete subject headings according to Dewey's first hundred categories or to some other practicable grouping. In this latter respect, the minute classification of subjects made by Waples and Tyler should be considered with a view to its suitability.<sup>1</sup> In one subject classification, these authors have divided twenty main classes into 115 subdivisions. The smaller divisions will manifestly be too detailed for everyday use. The main classes, however, may prove a convenient classification for analytical purposes. They will be found in Table VIII.

Table VIII is a suggested chart for analysing actual reading, based on data obtainable from the library records.

### 12. EXPLANATION AND USE OF TABLE VIII

The list of subjects in Table VIII has been adapted from Waples and Tyler.<sup>2</sup> It has already been suggested that librarians may wish to adapt the subject headings to meet their own requirements. The list itself, however, seems to be exhaustive.

Under the occupational classification, the groups may require explanation, although they are only used in the table in a very arbitrary way. Some librarians may require more, and some less, specific divisions.

<sup>1</sup> D. Waples and R. Tyler, *What People Want to Read About*. (Chicago: American Library Association and University of Chicago Press, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendices.

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TABLE VIII

CHART TO SHOW THE ACTUAL READING OF DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Occupational Group	Actual Reading																					Total
	1. Notables	2. Government	3. Int. Relations	4. Economic Theory	5. Industry	6. Pure Science	7. Applied Science	8. Health	9. Sex	10. Psychology	11. Social Problems	12. Crime	13. Education	14. Religion	15. Literature	16. Music	17. Art	18. Sport	19. Travel	20. Home	21. Others	
I. Total Borrowers																						100%
II. Total of Men ...																						
III. Total of Women																						
IV. Professional Men																						
V. „ Women																						
VI. Clerical Men ...																						
VII. „ Women																						
VIII. Skilled Men ...																						
IX. „ Women																						
X. Unskilled Men ...																						
XI. „ Women																						
XII. Unemployed Men																						
XIII. „ Women																						
XIV. Housewives ...																						
Total ...	100%																					100%

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Definitions of professional and clerical, skilled and unskilled, are matters largely of convenience. If the actual occupation is used, this question will not arise.

For those who wish to study and compare the reader classifications evolved by other investigators, reference should be made back to Part II, Chapter VIII, of the present study, in which the whole question of social traits is discussed at some length.<sup>1</sup>

We should pause at this point to show the application of the data included in this table to the practice of book selection. If what is most read is directly proportionate to what is most needed by the reader, then the information tabulated in Table VIII together with that of Table VII, "The Classification of Reading Groups," would provide a fairly precise criterion for the librarian. At least, he could thereby approximate the supply to the demand. But, as we have already seen, there is no positive correlation between actual reading and reading interest—largely because of a third factor, that of accessibility. In brief, people are inclined to read what they can get with the minimum of trouble rather than to seek out the literature they may be interested in. So that to leave a survey of reading at this stage would be to leave it very incomplete; and to translate the incomplete data into principles of book selection might merely result in the intensification of an inadequate policy. It is imperative, therefore, that the investigator examine reading interest with as much curiosity as he examines actual reading. And how shall he do this?

### 13. WHAT SUBJECTS ARE OF MOST INTEREST?

Several extensive studies have already been made on subject interest, so that a technique is available for

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 92-101.

## METHODS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY

those librarians who wish to adopt it bodily or to modify it according to their needs and resources. It is sometimes assumed by librarians that the classification schemes of the Library of Congress, British Museum, and Messrs. Dewey, Cutter, and Brown, provide a list of subjects which readers could check for interest. As a matter of fact a formal classification scheme is rather a conspectus of knowledge than a list of subjects. The complexity, detail, and terminology are not at all suited to the discovery of interest. Therefore a less particularized and a less formalized list of "everyday" subjects in "everyday" language is preferable; and it was with this in view that the various subject lists of American investigators were compiled. Their lists, of course, will not be wholly satisfactory for English workers, since they have naturally been compiled with a view to American problems and readers. The method of compiling them, however; the form the lists take; and the techniques of using them, might well be studied by English librarians.<sup>1</sup>

The method of Waples and Tyler exemplifies the exhaustive method of selecting topics. In their own words:

Over a period of ten years there is great likelihood that articles dealing with nearly every topic of interest to any considerable group of general readers will appear in one or more of the popular magazines. Magazines addressed to general readers are written to please a large and heterogeneous public. Such magazines must offer a wide range of subjects in each issue. No other source is more likely to yield a relatively complete list of topics of general

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there is an English version of these lists available, compiled by a committee under R. S. Lambert and W. E. Williams.



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contemporary interest than the files of a wide variety of periodicals.

In order to keep the list of non-fiction topics within control, five types of articles were excluded—namely, fiction, poetry, humour, articles of a technical nature, i.e. addressed to a particular vocation or special interest group, and articles dealing mainly with historical phases of a topic. Fiction, poetry, and humour were excluded because they are not usually considered useful sources of information. Articles of a technical nature addressed to a special interest group (such as those in the *American Barber*, the *Mathematics Teacher*, and the like) were excluded because they are not addressed to the general reader. Articles dealing only with historical phases of a topic, such as those describing the evolution of modern dances, were omitted because every topic may have an historical phase and the relative interest in the historical phase of a topic as compared to other phases requires separate study. For obvious reasons the contemporary rather than the historical phases of the topics are more useful in describing the reading interests of groups, some of whom have slight interest in history as such.<sup>1</sup>

Since magazine articles are often written under a false or misleading title, they must be examined and classified under descriptive headings. The method of doing so in the case of several Chicago Graduate Library School studies, has been described in some detail by Miss Margaret Crompton in *A Technique for Describing the Reading Interests of Adults*.<sup>2</sup>

All of this routine will be quite unnecessary for subsequent workers, if they are willing to use the lists already compiled by such exhaustive analyses of

<sup>1</sup> Waples, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.

<sup>2</sup> Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Chicago, 1929.

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periodical literature. And one great advantage of such lists is that the topics are specific, as contrasted with such vague generalities as "History," "Science," "Philosophy," and the like, which are found in library classification schemes.

The list of Waples and Tyler's twenty main topics is included in Table VIII, so that it is not necessary to write them down again. Under each heading, however, there is a series of statements which break down a general subject like Interesting Personalities into specific divisions; for example:

### I. Interesting Personalities:

1. Typical personalities.
2. People of legend and history.
3. Captains of industry.
4. Successful business men and women.
5. Statesmen and politicians.
6. Scientists.
7. Artists and musicians.
8. Authors.
9. Actors and actresses.
10. Educators and religious leaders.
11. Royalty and social leaders.
12. Military and naval heroes.<sup>1</sup>

The general librarian will not want to confront his readers with a list of 115 topics to read over and check, but the scheme may suggest something less unwieldy for his purposes. The following is a suggested form for collecting the information in as painless a manner as possible:

<sup>1</sup> Waples, *op. cit.*, p. 294.

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TABLE IX

## CHECK LIST OF TOPICS TO FIND SUBJECT INTEREST. QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LIBRARY PURPOSES

Name .....

Address .....

Are you a Library Borrower ?.....

If so, what is your ticket No. ?.....

If not, what is your:

Sex..... Age..... Occupation.....

The Library is eager to build up its collection according to the requirements and interests of its readers. In order to do this, it is first necessary that these requirements and interests should be known. Here is an opportunity for you to express your personal preferences. The following list of topics can be checked; or, if you wish, you can write down your own list of reading interests on the back of this sheet.

Library Class	Subject	Great Interest	Some Interest	No Interest	Remarks (e.g., suggested titles)	For use of librarian
	1. Notable Men and Women : (a) of the past (b) of the present 2. Government : (a) Home affairs (b) Foreign affairs 3. International Relations 4. Economic Theory 5. Industrial Conditions 6. Pure Science (give specific preferences if you have them) 7. Applied Science (give preferences)					

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Library Class	Subject	Great In-terest	Some In-terest	No In-terest	Remarks (e.g., suggested titles)	For use of librarian
	8. Aids to Health and Hygiene 9. The Proper Place of Sex in Life 10. Psychology and Ethics 11. Social Problems 12. How to Stop Crime 13. How to Get Educated 14. Place of Religion in Modern Life 15. Literature, The Classics 16. Music: Scores and Literature of 17. The Arts (give preferences) 18. Recreation and Sports (give preferences) 19. Travel and Exploration 20. Running a House 21. Other Interests (please list them)					

### 14. A CHART TO SHOW READING INTERESTS

In order to give some ponderable value to the replies to such direct or implied questions asked on this form, the librarian can use some simple scoring device, making *great interest* equal two points; *some interest* equal one; and *no interest* equal none. By this means an interest chart of the library clientele can be drawn up without much labour other than that of counting and without any statistical complications. And in so far as the name and ticket number of the borrower will enable the investigator to find that borrower's sex, age, occupation, and education (and hence to

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TABLE X

CHART TO SHOW READING INTEREST OF DIFFERENT  
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Occupational Group	Reading Interest																					Total
	1. Notables	2. Government	3. Int. Relations	4. Economic Theory	5. Industry	6. Pure Science	7. Applied Science	8. Health	9. Sex	10. Psychology	11. Social Problems	12. Crime	13. Education	14. Religion	15. Literature	16. Music	17. Art	18. Sport	19. Travel	20. Home	21. Others	
I. Total Borrowers																						100%
II. Total of Men ...																						
III. Total of Women																						
IV. Professional Men																						
V. „ Women																						
VI. Clerical Men ...																						
VII. „ Women																						
VIII. Skilled Men ...																						
IX. „ Women																						
X. Unskilled Men ...																						
XI. „ Women																						
XII. Unemployed Men																						
XIII. „ Women																						
XIV. Housewives ...																						
Total ... ..	100%																					100%

## METHODS OF COMMUNITY SURVEY

classify him according to his group), an interest chart of each reading group may be worked out. Before proceeding to discuss the value of such a chart, and before comparing it with the results of the other investigations of actual reading, let us pause to give a suggested interest chart in tabulated form.

It follows that a comparable chart may be made for each group and sub-group, provided the sample is reliable. Two physicians, for instance, would not be a fair sample of a medical group. The groups should be broken down only to the extent that the subdivisions remain representative. All of this, of course, will depend upon the size of the library clientele and the factors determining the occupational pattern of the region.

### 15. SUMMARY

In this chapter we have shown in a very simplified and rough way the methods of obtaining some of the data required for a proper understanding of the reading situation in any given district. We have also shown by similarly generalized charts and tables the technique for classifying the data when they have been obtained. If we may now suppose that a librarian had decided to survey his district; that his committee had approved his decision; that the machinery for the project had been set up; and that the methods and techniques outlined in the foregoing pages had been tried and adapted to the occasion: if we may suppose these feats of determination and organization, we may also assume that the librarian would have a wide and objective estimate of the amount and kinds of reading and the number and types of readers among the population he

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is serving. In terms of the seven questions with which we outlined a reading survey,<sup>1</sup> he will be informed on:

1. The state of reading within his district so far as it can be estimated quantitatively. This state is an index of the cultural level of the community and other cultural indices.
2. In comparison with the amount of reading, the number, nature, and location of reading sources. The relation of these sources to the public library. Service by "spheres of influence."
3. Who uses the public library: a classification of readers by social groups in order to find to what extent the library is fulfilling its democratic function.
4. What subjects are most read, and by whom: a comparison with the actual book stock of the library. Comparisons with "supply and demand" of other book-distributing agencies. The significance of these findings in terms of efficiency. What proportion of the library's stock is "dead wood"; and why.
5. What subjects are of most interest, and to whom: a comparison with actual reading and with the library's collection. The implications.

The acquisition of this information will involve much labour and some expense. Its analysis and interpretation will involve some hard thinking and much caution. Its presentation may be in several forms and combinations of such forms: generally descriptive; specifically statistical; or simply graphic. This last, I suppose, will be the most telling and acceptable way of presentation; for it will reduce a mass of unrelated data to a few maps, tables, and charts. Thus, the library's "sphere of influence" can be vividly brought out by means of a map such as that

<sup>1</sup> See p. 131.

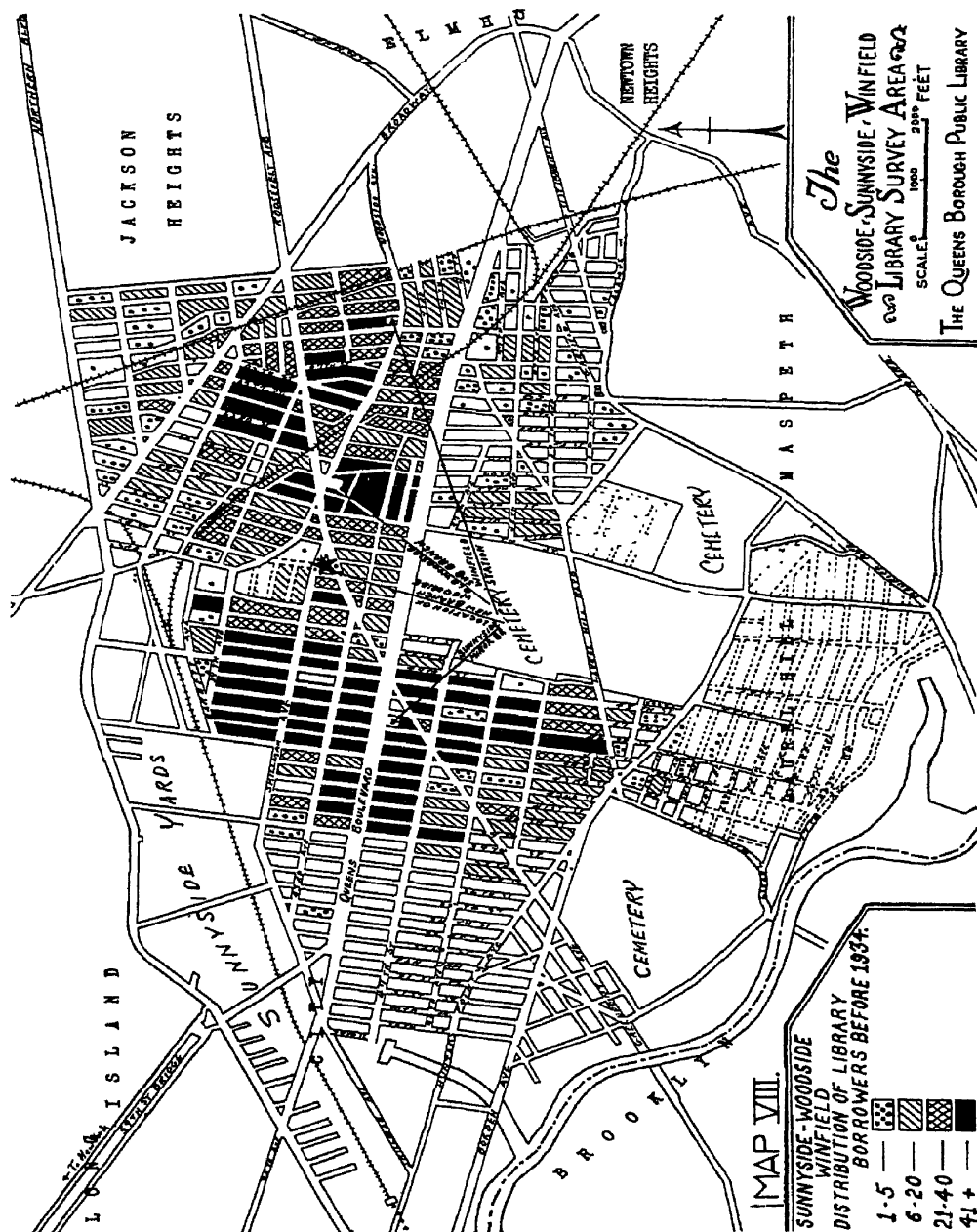


FIG 4. Map to Illustrate the Distribution of Library Borrowers in Relation to the Public Library.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from *Woodside Does Read!* Map VIII.



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used in the Woodside survey referred to above. In such a map the distribution of library borrowers is plotted, which distribution indicates the library's "sphere of influence." This range will usually be a circle whose centre is the library and whose radius will vary according to the topography and transport facilities of the particular area. In Fig. 4, the "sphere of influence" of two branch libraries is shown and the situation of a proposed new branch justified.

And so in the case of the several occupational groups using the library, a "bar diagram" (see Fig. 5) will bring out quite vividly facts which may look unsuggestive in statistical form.

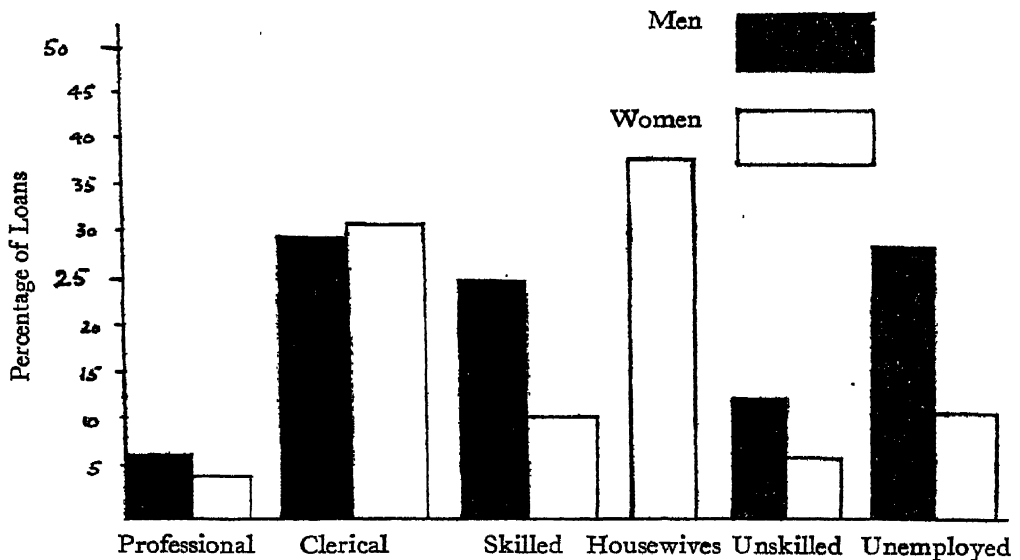


FIG. 5. Example of a Bar Diagram.<sup>1</sup>

And finally, a triple comparison can be made between what subjects are most available; what subjects are most read; and what subjects are of most interest.

<sup>1</sup> This is a purely hypothetical diagram, based on personal inferences.

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The graph arrangement in Fig. 6 is offered as a simple way of picturing that relationship.

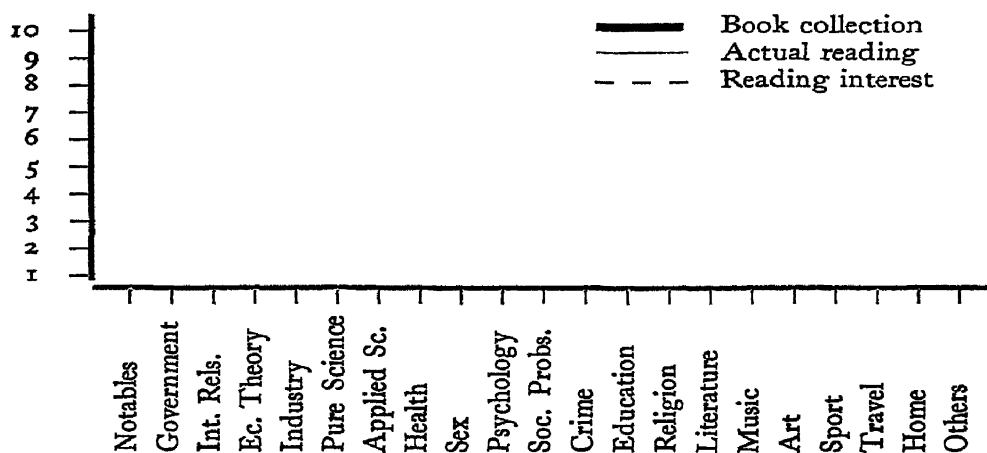


FIG. 6. Comparisons between Book Collection, Actual Reading, and Reading Interest.<sup>1</sup>

It should no longer be necessary to emphasize the importance to practical book selection of the facts obtained by a community survey of reading. No amount of assumption could explain away a great discrepancy between the three curves in Fig. 6, if they were plotted from objective data. No excuses,

<sup>1</sup> NOTE : No attempt has been made in this figure to put in hypothetical curves.

The scale used on the vertical axis would be based on a common denominator of the three factors involved. If the digits represent hundreds of books in the case of the stock and the actual reading, interest values would have to be a rough estimate in terms of the 1-10 scale. Thus,

0	1	2 3 4 5	6	7 8 9 10
No interest		Average interest		Great interest

However, if the Interest Chart suggested in Table X is kept in the form of decile ratings, the exact statistical value in terms of a 1-10 scale would be available.

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that is, for a lack of any positive relationship between the library's collection, its actual use, and readers' real requirements, would be acceptable. If there is no such relationship, the library service must be judged inadequate, and the earnest librarian will wish to improve it accordingly. With a definite knowledge of the reading situation, this will be possible; for if he knows what groups use the library, what they do read, and what they would read if they could, he is in possession of certain incontrovertible arguments upon which to base a reasonably sound book selection policy.

There are, however, other factors to be taken into consideration. For book selection cannot be based solely on a knowledge of actual reading and reading interests and reading sources; but, as we have seen, must take cognizance of the nature of the book and the function of the library. We shall deal with the former of these two matters first.

## CHAPTER XIII

THE NATURE AND DEFINITION OF THE "GOOD"  
BOOK

IN discussing the relationship—or lack of it—between actual reading and potential interest, we mentioned, in passing, the factors which may be responsible for readers often reading books in whose subjects they are not really interested; in brief, reading a substitute for the desired thing. Among these factors, the form, style, and degree of difficulty of the book itself were important elements; and it is not necessary to argue at length to indicate how readers are deterred or discouraged from reading on a subject by which they are genuinely attracted because the book is inaccessible (either not available, lost in an elaborate classification scheme, or plainly out of reach); disagreeable in appearance; unattractive in style; or, more likely, unsuitable in its manner of presentation.

Certain of these deterrents—accessibility and appearance—are matters of routine, and can be dealt with in their proper place. Librarians need no suggestions on these matters. They do all they can to "make the books go round" and to improve the appearance of their shelves, with considerable success. But in the matter of style and content, they cannot be so specific. This is not to say that they have not a good idea of what is inside their books, what is their degree of difficulty,

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and to what kind of reader they are suited. They may know all of this from observation and can apply this knowledge in individual cases. But in selecting a new book, they can go only by their "feel" of the situation, justifying by reference to their instinct the selection of an advanced or elementary treatment of a subject. In most cases, the librarian will attempt to have all degrees of difficulty or at least, the introductory, the general, and the advanced treatment. This sounds reasonable enough, but it may be a quite mistaken and, indeed, a wasteful kind of book selection. The adequacy of a book selection policy depends not upon the accepted ideas of a "good" library, of a "well-rounded" collection, but upon the library patrons themselves; and then, not upon some of these patrons as possible readers of some elementary and some advanced textbooks, but upon the known requirements of known groups.

Before we go on to illustrate this argument in more detail, the theory periodically advanced by writers on book selection that the first requisite of a public library book stock is that it should be complete and "well-rounded" is a theory that must be challenged. We challenge it on the grounds of function. The public library is not a depository nor a scholarly nor a special nor a reference library, either singly or all at once. Therefore it cannot house books which are wholly scholarly or specialized in purpose. This is the function of other institutions. There are, of course, scholarly and classical books which will be found in every public library, but they are not or should not be there because they are erudite, but because they are potentially useful to a known group or groups of readers. Usefulness is an indubitable criterion.

## NATURE AND DEFINITION OF THE "GOOD" BOOK

Moreover, the effort towards a well-rounded collection (an admirable purpose in the case of the private library whose owner has encyclopædic interests) is really futile in itself, since it is based upon a too-narrow concept of knowledge. So often only the humanistic masterpieces are included: the classics of Greece, Rome, and England; of France to a lesser extent; Germany and Italy still less; Spain hardly at all; and the rest of the world forgotten. So in the sciences the hoped-for well-rounded collection is generally a patchwork of bits and pieces. In the arts it is inclined to be top-heavy—with quite a lot about painting and nothing much about music. Thus the well-rounded collection very often turns out to be no more nor less than a reflection of the librarian's likes, dislikes, and indifferences. In any case, I repeat it is an impossible objective. There must be limits somewhere. Why not, then, the limits of usefulness, which for their part are sharply defined by the needs and interests and abilities of definite readers? The mention of this word abilities brings us again to the matter of content.

Stated in its most simple form, the whole problem of book selection is to provide a reader whose interests and ability are known with the book which suits those interests and that ability better than any other book. This is "perfect" book selection. Moreover, the fact that it is "perfect" does not mean that it is rare or unattained. The textbooks assigned for a given course to a given group of students are examples of adequate book selection. Children are sometimes taught to read by means of books which best suit their interests and abilities; and efforts are continually being made by educators to discover what are the vocabularies of children at various intellectual

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levels.<sup>1</sup> A few studies of like description have been made in the field of adult reading,<sup>2</sup> and every reader's adviser has additional information in his files.

Apart from academic studies, however, and the compilation of quite a number of special book lists suited to children, there is very little guidance for the practical librarian in this difficult task of finding the *right* books for adult groups—even when he knows something about his readers. What, then, is meant by the *right* book? Not necessarily the "good" book according to a library committee's æsthetic and moral standards; but the book which does not discourage by reason of its style or treatment the reader's initial interest.

How, then, is the librarian to judge whether style and content are appropriate? If he had the time and assistance, he might be inclined to make tests such as Dale and Tyler made in their study of adult reading difficulties. This is manifestly out of the question. Something more practicable is needed.

In the case of the children's lists, a committee of experts is generally called for selection purposes. The International Bureau of Education at Geneva published such a list which was the result of inquiries and the recommendations of authorities.<sup>3</sup> The extent of the

<sup>1</sup> For a bibliography of such studies, see W. S. Gray, *Summary of Investigations Relating to Reading* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925, and supplements).

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, E. Dale and R. W. Tyler, "Factors Influencing the Reading of Adults of Limited Reading Ability," *Library Quarterly*, July 1934, pp. 384-412.

<sup>3</sup> League of Nations, International Bureau of Education, *Littérateur enfantine et collaboration internationale* (Genève: Bureau international d'éducation, 1932).

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inquiries may be judged from the following sources  
which the compilers consulted:

1. Inquiries already made and published on children's tastes in reading.
2. Questionnaires sent to libraries, schools, etc.
3. Interviews with managers of bookshops.
4. Interviews with teachers.
5. Interviews with parents.
6. Interviews with children.
7. Individual opinions.

In these methods, I suggest, librarians have an indication of a procedure which can be followed to discover the reading tastes and ability of adult groups—a procedure which can only be followed by means of a considerable degree of co-operation. In the cases of adult groups, various sources of information are ready to hand. Readers' advisers, managers of successful commercial agencies, instructors and organizers of particular groups, the judgment of experts, and the statements of readers themselves will all contribute data, which will in time make possible the compilation of lists designed to meet the needs of particular adult groups. Such lists, indeed, have already been used in a restricted way. They have been used in the Leipzig public libraries whose director, Herr Walter Hofmann, has studied the reading tastes and competence of different groups with the object of selecting and listing their books accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

There is another method, however, which is implicit in the data obtained from a community survey; for the popularity of *authors* (as contrasted to the popularity of subjects, which is determined by quite

<sup>1</sup> See W. Hofmann, *Die Lektüre der Frau* (Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1931).



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different factors)—the popularity of authors must be based upon their ability to command and to hold the reader's attention. This will sound like an emphasis of the obvious, until we remember that we are searching for an explanation of this popularity and an explanation, in particular, in terms of style and presentation. To give an example: a reader may be interested in the theory of evolution but may be deterred from reading about it because of the difficulty or unintelligibility of the style and presentation of the available books. By way of contrast, he may have no interest whatsoever in scholastic philosophy, but will read about it with enjoyment in the pages of a pleasing stylist. The function of the book selector is to find the book on evolution presented in as pleasing a manner as the essay on scholasticism. This looks unlikely until we remember the increasing trend toward a happy combination of learned content and easy style. The scientist proper deplors this trend, of course. For him popular science is a matter of scorn and derision. But his indignation seems to be somewhat displaced. The layman reads popular science just as he reads certain historical novels or goes to a particular problem play or listens to a witty philosopher; because he has a general interest in anything if it is pleasingly presented. And there is no reason why he should not have a general and superficial interest in science. Admitted he sometimes sets himself up as an authority; but this attitude has no significance beyond the fireside circle.

I say there has been a trend toward the popularization of all branches of knowledge—particularly of the sciences of life, as well as of history, philosophy, and other fields. Often the expositor is a better writer than scientist; this criticism might be made of Wells as a

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biologist, Shaw as an economist, and Chesterton as an historian. But let us not take a highbrow attitude on these matters. The scientist has no monopoly on science, and even while he fulminates against the popular trend and popular judgment, he himself is taking a wholly lay interest and making wholly lay statements in other fields of knowledge—notably in metaphysics, philosophy, and religion.

To return to the purely technical aspects of these matters—of popularity in particular, we can observe the unqualified success of that kind of presentation which combines interest with easy exposition. The outlines of H. G. Wells are the most obvious examples, though the sallies of Jeans and Eddington into presumably "uninteresting" sciences would serve as well to make the point. And how is the book selector to know what is the nature of popularity and what kind of presentation appeals to which type of reader? Manifestly by an analysis of preferred writers.

Some interesting and significant studies have been made along these very lines. The experiments of Nicolai Roubakine and I. A. Richards in their studies of readers' reactions to literature have already been briefly discussed, so that they need not detain us here.<sup>1</sup> In any case, we are in search of some more objective standards of popularity. This objectivity was likewise the goal of Miss J. H. Foster in her attempt to find some definite terms to describe types of reading.<sup>2</sup> A fairly full account of the experiment can be found in the *Library Quarterly*, so that details of method and procedure need not delay us here. Very briefly, the

<sup>1</sup> Part II, Chapter VIII.

<sup>2</sup> "An Approach to Reading through the Characteristics of Its Readers," *Library Quarterly*, April 1936, pp. 124-74.

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two hundred and fifty authors most read by a community of some 15,000 people of mixed nationalities in an American industrial district were selected, and the characteristics of their readers noted. These characteristics were those which we have specified in connection with the classification of reading groups: sex, age, education, and occupation. At the same time, the authors were divided into six quality levels on the basis of reviews and first-hand acquaintance with their work, and then fitted into a rough subject classification. By a "rough subject classification" is meant not *content* but rather *type* of fiction. The subject classification is as follows:

- |                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| I. Detective.    | IX. Family.                         |
| II. Adventure.   | X. Psychological.                   |
| III. Romance.    | XI. Philosophical.                  |
| IV. Love.        | XII. Social and Political Problems. |
| V. Cheerful.     | XIII. Special Groups.               |
| VI. Humorous.    | XIV. Setting.                       |
| VII. Satiric.    | XV. Historical.                     |
| VIII. Character. |                                     |

It will be noted at once that this classification applies only to fiction and that it is rough and generalized. The distinction between Detective (I) and Adventure (II) may be purely arbitrary, and, of course, there are numerous authors whose books might equally be classified under several of the heads, since they deal equally with all. But the classification is useful in so far as the predominant theme or characteristic of most fiction writers is a single one. This is amply demonstrated in the classification of writers according to quality levels under the main heads. To illustrate:

CHART TO ILLUSTRATE QUALITY LEVELS WITHIN DIFFERENT CLASSES OF FICTION

Subject Class	Quality Level					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
I. Detective	Freeman Rohmer Beach Burroughs Chambers Curwood Barclay Dell Rice Roche	Christie Wallace Grey Haggard Farnol Wren Bailey Ruck Wiggin Arlen	Doyle Philpotts Dumas London Locke Deepling Ferber Alcott Wodehouse Baum Kennedy Bottome Gibbs Sinclair Burke Atherton	Buchan Kipling Blackmore Barrie Priestley Morley Dickens Walpole Milne Hilton Wells Kaye-Smith	Poe Defoe Massfield Brontë Clemens Macaulay Bennett Galsworthy Wharton Morgan Fallada Buck Cather Scott	Melville France Thackeray Joyce Tolstoi
II. Adventure						
III. Romance						
IV. Love						
V. Cheerful						
VI. Humorous						
VII. Satiric						
VIII. Character						
IX. Family						
X. Psychological						
XI. Philosophical						
XII. Social						
XIII. Special Groups						
XIV. Setting						
XV. Historical						

NOTE: The gaps are due partly to the compiler of the original chart not finding among the 250 authors examined suitable examples of the specific quality level; and partly to the present writer's omission of American writers without any appreciable British reputation. For the complete table, full names of authors, and explanations, see Miss Foster's article mentioned above.

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### *Explanation of Table*

The arbitrary nature of the six quality levels, like that of the main classes themselves, will be immediately apparent to the reader. It is hardly necessary to point out, in view of the names given as examples, that the first of the levels is the lowest, the sixth the highest. It should be immediately stated that the examples are all selected from Foster's list, the English and English-known names being preferred for illustrative purposes. Every librarian, of course, will disagree (as does the present writer) with the placement of some of the examples. In Class II, Adventure Stories, Kipling appears to be under-estimated by being pigeon-holed in Level 4 and Melville to be over-estimated in Level 6. But the Chart as a whole is a useful and stimulating survey of popular fiction, and it is every librarian's privilege to adapt and alter it as he sees fit.

What, then, is the relationship of this author classification to readers? The relationship is implicit in the reading group as defined by definite and measurable characteristics. For it has long been suspected that there is a positive agreement between what people are and what they read. The relationship of sex to reading, for instance, is a demonstrably positive one; and so is that of age, education, and occupation. If, therefore, we are able to classify a reading group by identifiable traits; and if we can likewise classify their reading preferences by means of fiction types and quality levels; if, in short, we know who are the readers and what are their reading abilities, we shall come appreciably nearer to that acme of book selection: choosing the right book for the right person. Moreover, when the nature and quality of the reading of the several groups are known, the librarian will be in a more justifiable

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position to make judgments upon the social value of the books he is distributing; and then to encourage those that are desirable and to deter those that are not. But until he knows who is reading what, he is in no position to do more than generalize on the subject of values; and generalization cannot be rationally applied to each and every individual case.

It will be seen at this point that book selection involves three factors, two of which can be measured with a fair degree of accuracy and the third of which is a variable quantity. These three factors may be stated as:

- A. The Group = Sex  $\times$  age  $\times$  education  $\times$  occupational characteristics : giving a high degree of homogeneity.
- B. The Class of Book = Type of book  $\times$  quality level (plot  $\times$  characterization  $\times$  style).
- X. The Social influence of A  $\times$  B.

To anyone whose interest in books and libraries goes beyond the questions of distribution and organization to include those of the ultimate social effects of reading, this unknown quantity will be particularly fascinating. To the cautious investigator, however, its dangers will be equal to its fascination. He will realize how easy it is, for instance, to jump to conclusions as to the value of X on the strength of data provided by A and B. Further, he will hesitate to postulate *reasons* until more is known of the psychology of reading. The facts of who reads and what is read cannot provide the answer to why an individual reads and with what result. However, certain *relationships* will be definite enough. That of reading to sex, age, and other social traits has been referred to time and again. Investigation, such as Miss Foster's, of relationships

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between cultural differences and preferences for different novelists will indicate others. Miss Foster, for instance, was able to conclude on the basis of her data that Cheerful Stories (see Class V), those without violent emotional tensions of any kind and with a Best of All Possible Worlds philosophy, *draw the least mature readers*. Adventure runs this class a close second, romance comes third, detective stories fourth, and so on. Other of Miss Foster's findings are that male readers prefer more "objective" fiction—adventure, detective stories, humour, and problem novels; and that these are the classes of fiction most read by those who like non-fiction. Married women of a high intellectual level write and read heavily in family chronicles. Married women of lower intellectual levels prefer love stories, while young, single women prefer cheerful stories and costume romances.

In the form of a table and grouped according to the social classification suggested in this study, the observed relationships between group and preferred reading might be mapped somewhat as follows:

TABLE XII  
EXAMPLES OF THE FICTION PREFERENCES OF  
OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS

Men	Types of Fiction	Women	Types of Fiction
Professional : (a) academic (b) business	Special Setting Detective Stories	Professional	Family Chronicles
Clerical	Detective, Humour, Adventure	Clerical	Cheerful Stories and Costume Ro- mances
Skilled and Unskilled	Humour and Ad- venture	Housewives	Love Stories

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As regards the social effect and consequent value of these various reading preferences, nothing at all can be said, unless the reader prefers to agree with Miss Foster's hypothesis of immaturity. She maintains on the basis of certain distinguished thinkers' statements that the immature person lives in a decidedly ego-centric universe, without much interest or understanding of the problems of others, living in the moment and without the inclination to evaluate even his own experiences. These are likewise the characteristics of inferior fiction. Second-rate novels present a world much easier to cope with than most of us have found the real one to be; but such a world is an easy escape into a rosy tinted universe in which every thing and every emotion is a bit blurred and fuzzy. Even the most melodramatic incidents are introduced rather to titivate than to fire the imagination. And the plot finally winds up with a hyper-romantic solution to all human troubles, as though the hero and heroine were to spend the rest of their existence in a discreetly erotic opium trance.

It is the immature and the socially maladjusted, then, who will seek escape in such wish-fulfilling fiction. The librarian's problem of whether or not he should afford such a means of escape from reality must be answered in terms of the social objectives of the public library.

This brings us back again to the *bases* for practical book selection: the literary, sociological, and psychological standards which formed the content of Part II.



## CHAPTER XIV

### ADMINISTRATION: BOOK SELECTION IN TERMS OF REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

WHEN it comes to speaking in terms of regional co-operation, librarians are all pretty well agreed and assured of each other's good judgment. Agreed with tacit reservations, however. Governmental control, or interference, as it would be called, cannot be tolerated by the majority of the profession; and in this respect, librarians are aligned with those private and secular schools, which vigorously resist any general legislation. They consider themselves a law unto themselves.

In Great Britain, however, there is an unprecedented development of regional library systems, which from the purely administrative angle arouse every librarian's appreciation. It is not necessary in view of the abundant literature of the subject to outline the interdependence of branch libraries with central libraries, of central libraries with regional bureaux, and of regional systems with the National Central Library. The whole well-organized co-operative system is most graphically described in terms of the service rendered the individual reader; for be he a villager in the smallest hamlet in Cheshire, he has at his ultimate disposal the resources of the nation's lending libraries.

The significance, then, of regional co-operation from the point of view of service is apparent enough;

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its implications for book selection have not been fully realized or analysed. Yet these implications may be put in the form of a direct question: To what extent should the co-operative system of book loans modify or determine the individual library's book selection? The tendency will be to answer this question at once with the rejoinder that librarians do recognize the implications of a regional system to their particular book policy: that they are relieved, for instance, of the need to purchase expensive books by referring the reader's request to the National Central Library or the regional pool, as the case may be. But this is not really an acceptable answer to the whole question. What it amounts to is a statement of the library's ability to satisfy demands that it could not otherwise consider; namely, the demands for rare, expensive, or specialized books, which no one considers it the province of the public library to supply. But the actual business of everyday book selection is scarcely affected by the availability of several millions of books at some more or less remote source; so that when we speak of book selection in terms of regional systems, we do not mean in terms of regional loan service.

What, then, do we mean? Specifically, a replotting of library districts in relation to (1) the service required, and (2) the financial means of support; and generally, a co-operative system of actual book selection presided over by a central library board. The writer is well aware of the objections and opposition to proposals of this nature, which have been made before in similar terms. It is natural that librarians should distrust some official, "dehumanized" control, particularly in this essentially subjective process of book selection. They also fear, of course, the loss of their

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autonomy and possibly a reduction in their status—a very righteous alarm in view of the long struggle for these advantages. But let us recognize at once that the proposals for a co-operative system and more centralized control need not imply the loss of interest, prestige, or remuneration in public librarianship. To the contrary, if there is any relationship between service and efficiency on the one side and prestige and reward on the other, then librarians can profit from the trend towards centralization. It has yet to be shown that a single public service has not improved both in organization and efficiency from centralization.

Before we go on to indicate the kind of regional arrangement which would best realize the principles of book selection based upon a knowledge of the community and the desire to satisfy the known reading needs of specific groups with the most adequate books, before we go on to indicate such a system, librarians should be reminded of the arguments in favour of it, which they themselves have long used and accepted. From the mass of professional literature, it is necessary to refer only to Chapter VI, "Co-operation of Stock" in *Small Municipal Libraries*.<sup>1</sup> Note the following introductory statement:

One of the greatest problems which the small borough and urban district libraries have to face is that of maintaining adequate and up-to-date book stocks. A public library, however large, without a live and constantly revised book stock cannot hope to be of permanent interest or use to the public which it serves, and nothing is more repellent to readers than an out-of-date and worn collection of books.

<sup>1</sup> 2nd ed. London, Library Association, 1934. See also the Chapter on "Co-operation" in the *Year's Work in Librarianship*, 1928.

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Yet how can libraries serving small populations maintain good and plentiful supplies of books upon the produce of a rate equivalent to less than 1s. a head per annum? It appears impossible. Since the inception of the library movement in Great Britain and Ireland, about 280 libraries have been established in areas with populations of less than 30,000. These, usually equipped with lending, reference, magazine, and newspaper departments, are making a brave struggle to maintain their buildings, the upkeep of which is so heavy that the funds available for books are in many cases negligible. The result is that the majority of them are stocked with obsolete, worn, and dirty books which they cannot afford to discard, and to these a small proportion of new stock is added annually, or, if quantity is preferred, a larger proportion is purchased by the sacrifice of quality. This financial difficulty has been amply proved in the course of investigations made by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, and the truth of the statement made at the Library Association Conference at Brighton is therefore apparent: that "an independent library service is not an economic function of a small community."<sup>1</sup>

Note also:

The second alternative is co-operation. Many small borough and urban authorities regard all suggestions relating to co-operation, especially with larger bodies, with the utmost caution, obviously fearing that their local powers will in time be infringed. It is difficult to understand this attitude, since it must be within the knowledge of all library authorities that their institutions are amply safeguarded by law, and that the transfer of their powers can only be brought about by a change of the law or by voluntary relinquishment on their part. The policy of small areas remaining completely independent is admirable in so far as an independent spirit and local pride are

<sup>1</sup> *Small . . . Libraries, op. cit.*, p. 83.

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admirable ; but when independence can only be maintained to the detriment of the services rendered, and authorities are proud of inferior institutions, it is entirely unsound.<sup>1</sup>

With the arguments before us of such a cautious theory as that advanced in *Small Municipal Libraries* and the indication of trends in the reports of practical librarians,<sup>2</sup> it should not be necessary to justify a new policy of co-operative book selection.

We may start in an outline of such a policy with another suggestion already mooted in an official publication.

Where two or more libraries of a similar size are situated near together, the great possibilities of co-operation of stock should be considered. Co-operation on equal terms is easily arranged, and there need be no question of complicated money payments. The stock of each library should be freely available to the other; borrowers' tickets can be made interchangeable, and loans of books in bulk can be made. In addition, the selection of books available to the joint borrowers can be widened by co-operation in buying. For example, each library might agree to form special collections of books of use to the whole area, and considerable duplication of expensive books would thus be avoided. Readers would have access to the joint library stocks, and any special books required could be obtained from a larger library.<sup>3</sup>

It is quite obvious from this suggestion that a pooling of resources and service is recommended. The

<sup>1</sup> *Small . . . Libraries, op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> J. D. Stewart, "Developments Since . . . 1927," *Library Association Record*, October 1934, pp. 348-55.

<sup>3</sup> *Small . . . Libraries, op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

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suggestion, however, is somewhat sketchy, only the idea, as it were, being thrown out for consideration. It can be fruitful enough, for it involves questions not only of loans, co-operation in buying, specialization in certain fields, and the avoidance of duplication in others, but likewise the questions of community survey which have been emphasized throughout this study. The point is, that if there is to be co-operation, it may as well be extensive and thorough. The exchange of privileges, inter-loan, and the more or less arbitrary choice of special collections for special attention are not enough. The librarians of the co-operating libraries must know each other's reading clientele and needs, which implies that they must know the same facts of their own groups. How else can co-operation be justified?

Co-operation according to the principles of book selection advanced in this study means the extension and common use of community surveys such as were specified for the individual library in preceding chapters. The train of thought is logical enough. There is no point in co-operating if you are not sure to what end or with what result. At all events, in the case of two municipal libraries collaborating without these conditions, the only positive advantage would be a greater variety of books for those borrowers who had the time and inclination to go greater distances to get them. But is this sufficient justification for co-operation? Is it an adequate standard of service?

The mention of adequate standards of service seems to be the crux of the whole matter of co-operative book selection. For we must be able to measure the existing service before we go on to elaborate an organization. It has already been suggested that the existing standards

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are inadequate. Circulation figures, reference issues, number of volumes, days open, and so forth unfortunately tell us nothing about the *value* of library service; and they tell us nothing about the degree of coincidence between such services and the cost of providing it. We are told, of course, the expense figures of running the library, with so much for salaries, so much for new books, so much for maintenance, and so forth. But what is the *meaning* of these figures? Why are they what they are? Let those who consider these questions redundant peruse the following table, showing the number of borrowers, per cent. of borrowers to population, and so forth of six American public libraries serving a population of 30,000 to 40,000 people; and of six British municipal libraries of comparable size.

The American figures in Table XIII are based on the "Public Library Statistics," included in the April (1935) number of the Bulletin of the *American Library Association*.<sup>1</sup> The British figures are taken from "Municipal Library Statistics, 1934-35," included in the October (1935) issue of the *Library Association Record*.<sup>2</sup> The British figures are very much less detailed and complete than the American; but there is a serious deficiency in both sets which makes comparisons difficult. The American statistics do not give the expenditure on books and the British figures do not give the expenditure on salaries. It is useless, of course, to guess at these important items.

<sup>1</sup> "Public Library Statistics," *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, April 1935, pp. 208-13.

<sup>2</sup> "Municipal Library Statistics, 1934-35," *Library Association Record*, October 1935, p. 480.

STATISTICS OF SIX AMERICAN AND SIX BRITISH PUBLIC LIBRARIES SERVING TOWNS OF  
30,000 TO 40,000

Town	Popula- tion	Borrowers	Per cent. of Borrowers to Popu- lation	Circula- tion (Loans)	Circula- tion per Head of Popula- tion	Total Expenses on Books	Expenses on Salaries	Total Cost per Capita (original currency)	Total Cost per Capita (English currency)
<b>AMERICA :</b>									
1. Alameda, Calif.	35,033	19,536	55.25	415,316	11.85	\$ 31,940	\$ 15,160	\$ 0.91	3/9
2. La Crosse, Wis.	39,614	17,075	43.10	317,524	8.01	26,982	14,545	0.68	2/10
3. Waltham, Mass.	39,247	12,587	32.07	414,591	10.56	30,864	17,895	0.79	3/3
4. Elkhart, Ind....	32,949	17,485	53.07	235,307	7.14	15,452	10,101	0.47	2/-
5. Moline, Ill. ...	32,236	13,717	42.55	280,187	8.69	19,514	9,658	0.60	2/6
6. Watertown, Mass.	34,913	11,784	33.75	402,773	11.54	36,720	22,055	1.05	4/2½
American Average...	35,665	15,364	43.30	344,283	9.63	\$ 26,912	\$ 14,902	\$ 0.75	3/-
<b>GREAT BRITAIN :</b>									
1. Batley	33,890	4,788	14.1	143,216	4.23	£ 1,867	£ 582	d	1/1¼
2. Cannock	34,588	2,834	8.1	48,735	1.41			13.22	
3. Bebbington	32,805	7,499	23.5	221,380	6.75			22.2	1/10½
4. Perth	34,807	14,115	40.6	336,428	9.66	3,270	1,041	23.7	1/11½
5. Surbiton	39,000	10,304	26.42	312,154	8.00	3,849	1,225		
6. Swinton	38,400	5,788	15.07	360,824	9.40				
British Average	35,583	7,554	18.80	237,123	6.57	£ 2,995	£ 949/6/0	19.71	1/7½



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However, certain significant facts stand out in the two sets of figures. First, in an average town of 35,000 odd inhabitants, the American public library serves just twice as many borrowers as an English institution. Secondly, much as we might expect, the double service costs twice as much, three shillings (75 cents) per capita in America; 1s. 7½d. (about 40 cents) in Britain.

These figures will mean different things to different interpreters of them. Some may generalize and maintain that the service is proportionate to the expenditure. A more exact statement of this hypothesis, however, would be that the *number* of people served is proportionate to the total expenditure. This statement says very little about the *type* or actual *value* of the service. To take the particular unit we are concerned with here, it says very little about the adequacy of the book collection. If we had the figures, we should no doubt find that the greater the total expenditure, the bigger the book budget. This is true of those examples we have (Batley, Surbiton, and Swinton); but it may be that the extra burden on the local rates is not justified by the purchase of a corresponding greater number of books, particularly if these books appeal to only one element of the population—that which enjoys detective stories and light romance, for instance. What *standards*, as distinct from records, of library service can the librarian point to in defence of higher book budgets, better salaries, and the resultant increased rates?

A professor of Economics at the University of Chicago has put the problem in this form:

The first problem confronting the public library is the demonstration of its social utility in terms of functions performed and costs imposed. Whether public libraries have a valid claim for a portion of the public funds depends

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not only upon the demand, character, quality, and cost of library service but also upon the demand for and cost of other public functions. The support of a library can only be justified if there are no other more important activities to be financed by government and if the costs of such services do not exceed the expenses of securing the same service in some other manner. The major fiscal problem of the government lies in the balancing of public functions and in making choices between those things to be done and those to be left undone; of deciding how much is to be spent on one activity before funds can reasonably be devoted to other purposes. Under such conditions various public activities compete for the "good will," as well as the support, of taxpayers. The decision as to the character and extent of public functions rests ultimately with them.<sup>1</sup>

It is apparent from this point of view that librarians must demonstrate their service in terms of "functions performed," or, as Leland later calls them, "units of cost." What are some of these functions? They may be stated in terms of their cost; for example:

1. Cost of library loans
2. Cost of reference service
3. Cost of cataloguing and indexing
4. Cost of new books

—all of *these* costs needing comparison with the use and usefulness of the *functions* themselves.

Let us look more closely at item 4, the cost of new books. Some of the figures relevant to an evaluation are already available in most libraries; e.g., purchase price of such and such books; number of issues; intrinsic value of the book—reference, instructive, literary, recreational, or plain trash. But other equally

<sup>1</sup> S. E. Leland, "Observations on Financing Libraries," *Library Quarterly*, October 1932, pp. 344-66.

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important factors are not: such as which readers are expected to use the book and who does actually use it once it is placed on the shelves. For instance, a book selected may definitely belong in the class of trash (the first grade of Miss Foster's classification discussed above) and be borrowed chiefly by a group who could reasonably be expected to purchase the book themselves or to pay twopence for it at a commercial rental agency. I do not say that they should have to do so, but I say that such a possibility should be borne in mind when evaluating book selection by standards of service.

Let us return now to a consideration of the main argument of this chapter, the desirability of a co-operative system of book selection. We have noted the value and efficiency of the existing regional systems in making a large number of books available to a large number of people. We have also noted the suggestions of practical librarians for a greater degree of collaboration between library and library, this collaboration to include the pooling of book resources. From this point we went on to suggest that in order to make such collaboration effective each library should have a good knowledge of its community's reading needs and of its existing service, this service to be measured not in terms of pounds, shillings, and pence, but in terms of the effectiveness of the various library units. A comparison of twelve medium-sized public libraries was suggested in order to intimate the wide variation resulting from the present system of independence and autonomy. One library serving a population of 30,000 to 40,000 has an income of 1s. 1¼d. (Batley); another (Surbiton) of 1s. 11½d. per capita. In the former town only 14·1 per cent. of the population receive library service, although every citizen is paying for it; and in

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the latter 26.42 per cent. receive service. In the case of the London boroughs an even greater discrepancy between income will be found, often one borough with a comparatively small population having a far greater income than another with a very large population.<sup>1</sup> Financially, therefore — and administratively — the present system of a number of independent library kingdoms is an uneven one to say the least. The service and book selection will be correspondingly uneven; so that even if Library A conducted a community survey, it would be unable to make the necessary improvements thereby suggested without some financial co-operation on the part of Library B.

It will now be seen that it is inadequate to talk any longer in terms of individual co-operation. There must be regional co-operation with a central board of control. Whether this central board should be a government or professional body, it is not the purpose of the present writer to discuss. But from the point of view of service, from the point of view of finance and of efficient book selection, some such regional system and some such board of control are vitally necessary. We can visualize this board as a central agency which integrates the policy and service of every individual library. It will be, moreover, the common pool referred to at the end of Part II, the pool into which all information and data are collected for common use.<sup>2</sup> Under such a board's direction, community surveys of reading can be made as they have long been made of other social activities. Advice and assistance can be furnished. That most

<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of this question, see J. H. Wellard, "Introduction to a Comparative Study of American and English Library Law," *Library Association Record*, December 1934, pp. 452-53.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 111.

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serious problem of all, overlapping and duplication, can be worked out to the common good; and book collections and book selection will improve accordingly.

Finally, those who consider such a set-up too ambitious or too impractical should be reminded, first, of the increasing trend towards regionalism and centralization in all national services; and, secondly, of the existing professional organizations such as the library associations, which already have the machinery for undertaking this general supervisory service. Then there is a third consideration which appears to the present writer to be more important than either of these: the greater unity, efficiency, and prestige which will accrue to librarianship as a result of a new outlook, a new policy, and a new effort.

## CHAPTER XV

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

THIS study has been divided into three Parts, and to some readers it may seem as though the arguments advanced in each Part are independent of, or incompatible with, the others. To many people there is always a sharp division between theory and practice, as though the former were pursued and useful only in the study room or the laboratory; and the latter were practically divorced from theory, even if ultimately dependent upon it. The real difference between theory and practice, however, is one of emphasis; beyond that it is impossible to define any divergence, since both are concerned with the same material, both have the same objective, and both contribute to and draw upon a common fund of knowledge.

This is particularly true of book selection, although in this field of knowledge the theorist appears to be a somewhat specious, if not suspicious, individual. But an unco-operative attitude between practitioner and theorist is surely regrettable in view of the common purpose of both; namely, the best and most efficient means of providing the public with information and recreational literature. But the present writer feels that such hostility and distrust as exist between the hard-pressed librarian in the public library and the somewhat bewildered research worker in the study will rapidly

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grow less as each understands the purpose and function of the other.

This study, then, has attempted above all to show the need of a scientific approach to the problems of book selection. Once again, and for the last time now, a half apology must be made for the use of this term "scientific," and a request renewed that the writer's intentions be not misunderstood as holding a brief for pedantry. But if this book has indicated anything at all, it will have indicated that book selection is not simply a process of choosing books from the publishers' catalogues and literary magazines according to the individual librarian's estimate of what his patrons would or should read. This individual competence, as we have emphasized elsewhere, is an admirable attribute; but it is not universal or thorough enough to ensure the most efficient book selection. Hence little if any attention has been given to this procedure of picking out titles, and no mention whatsoever has been accorded a routine process which usually figures fairly large in manuals of book selection; namely, book ordering.<sup>1</sup> For it was considered that there was really little need for further discussion of a wholly mechanical job of work, which can presumably be efficiently done in one way alone.

Instead, the principles and practice of book selection have been propounded as though a field of knowledge were involved as well as the individual procedure of picking titles and the mechanical process of ordering books. Instead of beginning with the assumption that the objectives of the library have all been settled and agreed upon, we have attempted to discover from a brief analysis of the social history of the public library

<sup>1</sup> See any standard text-book on Book Selection.

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what the objectives actually have been or were intended to be. We found, it will be remembered, that they were never very definite, and are still less definite to-day now that libraries are called upon to be recreational as well as educational, and specialized as well as democratic. The significance of all this to book selection was intimated in the second Part, in which the fields of knowledge most nearly related to book selection were examined to see if they could throw some light on this commonplace but vitally important question, "What is the public library trying to do?" or, in the strict terms of book selection, "Why should certain books be selected out of the millions available?"

Just as it is the related fields of knowledge—Literature, the Social Sciences, and the others discussed in Part II—which can best answer the former of these questions in terms of specific objectives, so it is certain methods and techniques borrowed from these fields that can best give us the data necessary to answer the latter.

This study, then, has been divided into three parts, because the principles and practice of book selection are bounded by three lines of thought: What is the function of the public library? What should its objectives be? and, How can those objectives be applied in practice? This dissertation has done little more than skirt these boundaries. Other more specialized workers, both practical and theoretical, must define them more precisely.





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